

# NEW SPOTLIGHT FORTNIGHTLY

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## Notes From The Editor



The fifth round of Nepal-India Eminent Persons Group (EPG) meeting has concluded as Nepal continues on its political transition, all set to hold two important elections, of provincial and national levels. The Nepali delegation members of the EPG have revealed that they discussed many issues of bilateral relations, including the treaty of 1950. Treaty or no treaty, Nepal and India share over 1600 kilometers of border. There are so many cultural and religious commonalities between the two countries. The treaty binds the official relations, but there are other ties, which are more important than the formal treaty. Surrounded by the natural border, crossing thousands of streams and rivers, giving the peoples pain as well as gain, Nepal-India relations are unique. Thousands of people, wild-animals and even domesticated animals of one country enter into another. In this geography, which features so much of diversity, one cannot expect that a team consisting of a few Nepali members can address all the issues. So far as the agenda is concerned, no treaty can satisfy all. Nepal-India Treaty of 1950 is the same. One of the often ignored but important parts of the so called "unequal" treaty is the recognition of Nepal as a sovereign, independent and equal nation and it is equally applicable to both the nations. However, some Nepali intellectuals, particularly communists see that the 1950 treaty was signed by Mohan Sumsher Rana to retain his power and it is unequal. Although Nepal and India have formal mechanisms at the foreign secretary level to address the bilateral issues, political leaders rarely rely on this channel led by seasoned and career diplomats of Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Besides, the prime minister has his own political channel. With no accountability, giving huge responsibility to a group like EPG is hard to justify. Career diplomats of Ministry of Foreign Affairs should be given the full responsibility to handle the issue. New Spotlight wishes all our readers and patterns Happy Dipawali, Nepal Sambat and Chhath.

**Keshab Poudel**

Editor

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COAS GENERAL CHHETRI'S TWO YEARS

# Capability Boost

*In the history of Nepal Army, the First Exclusive Unit for Women was established during COAS General Chhetri's first two years in office*

By A CORRESPONDENT

With almost two and a half century long history, Nepal Army has established itself as an institution of hope for the Nepali people. Leading it for three years as the chief of Nepal Army will be just a small part of the long history. However, every COAS wishes to do something to remember for his tenure in the history.

Started from Prithvi Narayan Shah the Great, who led Nepal Army in the process of national unification, up to current chief COAS General Rajendra Chhetri, Nepal Army has seen many ups and downs in its institution building. As Nepal is in the process of promulgation of new constitution and its implementation, Nepal Army has a bigger role to take the country out of the constitutional and political turbulence.

Since being appointed to the high office on Ashoj 9, 2072, Chief of Army Staff General Rajendra Chhetri has led Nepal Army in a very crucial political juncture as well as at a time of earthquake reconstruction.

Just a week after his appointment, he issued COAS's Command Guidance - 2015, which included the vision and mission of Nepal Army for his three-year tenure, including restructuring Nepal Army in line with the new federal constitution.

As two years have passed since his appointment, Chief of Army Staff General Rajendra Chhetri reviewed the progress made during the period. He also reviewed the progress made under the COAS's Command Guidance - 2015.

Although there are so many visible and invisible changes that have occurred in the last two years, the establishment for a separate women's unit is a visible and

remarkable development in the history of Nepal Army.

Although Nepalese women have been playing a different role in the army for long, this is the first time separate unit under the command of



women has been established.

Reviewing the success and achievement and failure of own tenure is a good practice, which needs to be continued for even the new comers. COAS General Chhetri has shown the courage to evaluate work in front of all the army officers in relation to how much progress Nepal Army has made during his tenure.

Addressing Nepal Army Officers and other rank and files, COAS General Chhetri said that Nepalese people has a great faith

on Nepal Army as it works with people in disaster and for other welfare programs.

"Nepal Army is a center of hope, trust and unity of Nepalese people. Even international community has praised the role of Nepal Army in disaster management back home and peacekeeping with devotion and commitment for international peace with selfless service and professional dedication," said COAS General Chhetri.

He said that Nepal Army played a role in holding peaceful, impartial and credible local elections by transporting the ballot papers in sensitive areas and providing security in printing the ballot paper.

Just a week after assuming office, COAS General Chhetri announced his own programs for Nepal Army. In the last two years, COAS General Chhetri has taken many steps, which will contribute in future to strengthen Nepal Army.

With Best Wishes & Greetings  
on the Auspicious Occasion of  
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## NEWSNOTES

### Bairagi Visits Bangladesh

Foreign Secretary Shanker Das Bairagi paid a call on Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, at the latter's office in Dhaka.

During the meeting, wide range of issues were discussed that included trade, transit, connectivity, energy, investment, culture, higher education and tourism, among others. Promoting cooperation under BBIN framework also figured during the discussion.

According to a press release issued by Ministry of Foreign Affairs, both sides agreed to work together to enhance partnership and collaboration on mutually agreed areas with a view to further strengthening the bilateral ties.

Earlier this morning, Foreign Secretary Bairagi had a bilateral meeting with M. A. N. Siddique, Secretary of the Road Transport and Highways Division, Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges. The Secretaries focused their discussion on enhancing cooperation on transport and all modes of connectivity between the two countries.



### Former King Worried

Former King Gyanendra Shah has said he is deeply troubled over the growing politicization of state organs on the one hand, and an unprecedented threat that the indigenous culture, tradition and moral values were facing from outside.

In his message to the nation on the occasion of B i j a y a D a s h a m i, former King Shah said the politicization of all organs of the state was 'unusual' as it has adversely affected the impartiality of the state, and eroded people's faith and confidence on it.

"Some external forces are using a resource to weaken integrity and self-pride of the nation, something that the people have experienced. Our collective responsibility lies in protecting our history. We must be aware that our sovereignty and prospects of prosperity are at peril," he said, echoing a concern that most opposition and traditional parties have been raising.



### France Provides A Humanitarian Aid

The French Government has provided a humanitarian

aid of EURO 100,000.00 (EURO one hundred thousand) to Handicap International/Nepal (HI) for the victims of the 2017 floods in Tarai.

For the implementation of the aide, HI will target the families that are the most vulnerable such as persons with disabilities. HI will use the aid to cater the immediate needs of the affected people in Tarai and the families that have been displaced. The targeted districts are Banke and Dang.

As for the beneficiaries, about 700 families (3,500 persons) would receive nonfood item kits, about 400 people would benefit from health and rehabilitation camps, about 600 vulnerable people would receive psychological support to overcome the trauma caused by the catastrophe, and about 300 wounded would receive functional rehabilitation support.

Regarding this aid, French Ambassador to Nepal Yves Carmona said, "France, as a true friend, stands alongside Nepal to support the government and help the Nepali people affected by the floods. As the people with disability are the most vulnerable (among others) during difficult times, we will be working with Handicap International, a French INGO well-known in its domain, to help those affected surmount this catastrophe."

The Country Director of Handicap International/Nepal, Willy Bergogne, said, "The support from France and the French Embassy will be crucial in ensuring that people with disability and vulnerable population of Banke and Dang benefit from adequate support following the floods that affected the southern part of Nepal."

According to a press release issued by Embassy of France, earlier, the French government had provided Euros 200,000 to UNICEF/Nepal for the management of acute malnutrition in 18 flood-affected districts. After the aid to HI, the total French aid for Nepal for the flood affected districts amounts to Euros 300,000 (Euros three hundred thousand).

### Indian Embassy Celebrates Gandhi Jayanti

Nepal-Bharat Library, the Embassy of India and BP Koirala India-Nepal Foundation have celebrated Gandhi Jayanti here. Former Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand launched the Nepali edition of the Gandhi's autobiography on the occasion.

"The story of My Experiments With Thru" was translated by Shekhar Giri and published by Shivalik Prakashan. The release program was attended by more than 150 Nepalese writers, artists, intellectuals and media persons.

In his address at the program, former PM Chand spoke about the role of Mahatma Gandhi in the freedom struggle of India. Former prime minister Chand also spoke at the program on the contributions of Mahatma Gandhi and called him an icon of world peace.

Lawmaker and renowned Gandhian Pradeep Giri and Ambassador of India to Nepal Manjeev Singh Puri jointly released the book along with Former PM Chand. Speaking at the program, Giri stressed on how the principle of ahimsa had the power to bring stability in administration and society of a country.

Ambassador Puri spoke about the relevance of Mahatma Gandhi's teachings to modern day world also. Ambassador Puri commended Vice-President of Nepal-India Friendship Association Shekhar Giri for his immense labor for the translation of the iconic autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi.



Also on display at the program was a photographic exhibition of some rare photographs from the life of Mahatma Gandhi. A documentary on the life of Mahatma Gandhi was also shown on the occasion. The members of Kalaguthi and students of famous Gandhian of Nepal late Tulasi Mehar demonstrated the process of producing fabrics from 'Charkha' on the occasion.

**EU Releases €800 000 To Support Flood Victims**

In response to the widespread floods that swept across large parts of Nepal recently, the European Union is providing €800 000 (NPR 98.5 million) in emergency relief funding to assist the most affected populations. This allocation is part of a larger regional allocation of €2 million in response to floods in South Asia.

"The countries in South Asia are facing some of their worst floods in decades, which are resulting in a large-scale humanitarian situation affecting millions. It is especially in these hard times that EU solidarity makes a difference: our support will reach those most in need and help them recover from the devastating losses they have suffered," said Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos Stylianides.

EU support will provide life-saving assistance, prioritising shelter, food assistance, water and sanitation, health and protection to those affected by the floods, while restoring the safety and dignity of the most vulnerable populations. The funding will be channelled through the European Commission's European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations department (ECHO).

Nepal is witnessing its worst flooding in 15 years, which is affecting almost two million people. Some 160 people lost their lives, 20 900 families are still temporarily displaced and at least 235 000houses have been damaged or completely destroyed. Because of the massive loss of livestock, people are now dependent on food distributions; however, so far these have not been sufficient to meet the basic needs of the most vulnerable population.

**Delighted To Be Posted To Serve The Region**

Soyoung Park, Canada's new Deputy High Commissioner to India and Deputy Ambassador to Nepal and Bhutan, has shared her views about her posting.

Soyoung Park said that she was delighted to be posted in India. "I have been looking forward to this posting as I have fond memories of India from my previous posting. This



is a particularly strategic time to be here as the Canada-India relationship is expanding in exciting ways," said Park.

Joining the Canadian Foreign Service in 1998, Park has served in New Delhi, Beijing and Damascus in the past. As part of her responsibilities in the Immigration program, Park focused on improving client service while maintaining the integrity of the immigration system.

In 2008, she became the Executive Director, Global Case Management System and e-Services where she led the development of trendsetting information technology systems that resulted in improved processes and significant cost savings for Immigration Refugees Citizenship Canada. In 2012, she was awarded a Public Service Award for Innovation and the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal.

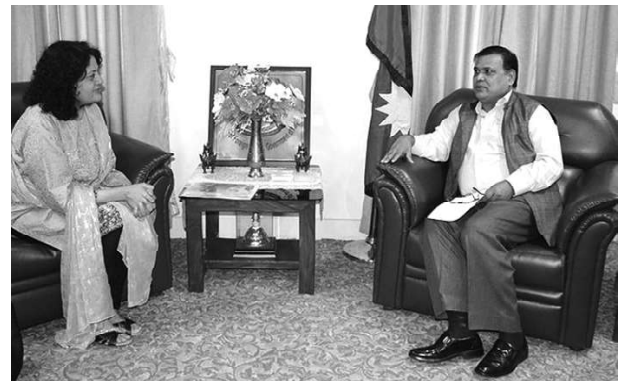
**New UNFPA Chief Baqi Presents Credential**

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Krishna Bahadur Mahara received the Letter of Credence from new Representative of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to Nepal, Lubna Baqi, at a ceremony at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

After the presentation of the credentials, Baqi briefed DPM Mahara on UNFPA cooperation activities in Nepal and highlighted the 7th UNFPA country program which is currently under implementation, said a press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In response, DPM Mahara underlined the need for continued cooperation of UNFPA in the days to come.

The UNFPA has been working in Nepal since 1971, with



its current programs relating to sexual and reproductive health, adolescent and youth, gender equality, women's empowerment and population dynamics.

On the occasion, Baqi said she was honored to represent the UN Population Fund in Nepal, that the UNFPA was ready to support the Nepal government's efforts in promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality and strengthening population data collection and analysis capacities in Nepal.

According to the UNFPA Nepal, Ms. Baqi took up her new assignment as UNFPA Representative Nepal on 3 October 2017. Before her deputation to Nepal, she served as Deputy Regional Director in UNFPA's Asia and Pacific Office in Bangkok since 2011.

"Moreover, she was UNFPA Representative in Sri Lanka and Country Director in the Maldives (2003-2007), supporting the development and implementation of programme operations as well as the humanitarian response to the devastating 2004 Asian Tsunami," according to RSS. ■

## BUSINESS BRIEF

### CG Starts Wai Wai Noodle Production In Europe

President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić has inaugurated Wai Wai Noodle Plant in Serbia. According to a press release issued by Chaudhary Group, the plant will produce and



supply Nepal's popular Wai Wai noodle brand in Europe.

Wai Wai has already started commercial production from Ruma Plant in Serbia. Serbian President Vučić expressed the hope that this plant will contribute to improving Serbian economy and employment generation.

During the ceremony, president of CG Corp Global, Binod Chaudhary, managing director Nirvana Chaudhary and other high-level officials from Chaudhary Group were present. President Chaudhary said that this plant is a milestone to globalize the Wai Wai brand. President Chaudhary also informed that the Wai Wai produces in Serbia will be distributed all over Europe. With four hundred Serbian nationals on staff, Nepalese will take care of the high-level management of the Wai Wai plant in Serbia.

Managing Director Nirvana Chaudhary said that all the major European cities are within about 1000 kilometers from Roma. This plant will be a gateway to other European markets. Wai Wai is also among the popular products in the United States of America. Chaudhary thanked the Serbian government officials for support to complete the construction of the plant in time. CG Corp Global has invested in 30 countries in the areas like construction, hospitality, finance, food and beverage, electronic goods, hydropower and education. The company has ten thousand employees globally, managing 112 companies and 76 brands.

### World Bank Approves US\$ 60M Credit For Nepal

The World Bank has approved a US\$ 60 million credit to support the second phase of the Enhanced Vocational Education and Training Project in Nepal. EVENT II is designed to help the country improve equitable access to market relevant training programs and to strengthen the delivery of Technical Education and Vocational Training (TEVT).

In Nepal TVET is an important intermediary between youth and the labor market through the provision of pre-employment skills. Between 450,000 and 500,000 Nepali youth come of working age every year, most of whom will enter either the domestic or the foreign labor market with limited education and skills. On the other hand, the annual intake capacity in short-term and long-term TVET programs in the country was between 100,000 and 120,000 in 2016. While TVET has grown in size over time with formal and informal providers across a variety of government and non-

government entities, it continues to face the challenges of quality training for domestic and foreign labor markets, inclusion and cohesion.

"Skill development of the workforce through investment in human capital including technical and vocational education and training are critical for the successful implementation of the country's emerging jobs agenda," said Takuya Kamata, the World Bank's Country Manager for Nepal.

"While there is substantial underemployment and informal employment dominates, an increased focus on skills and employability will help Nepal benefit from its potential youth dividend," said Sangeeta Goyal, Senior Economist and the Bank's Task Team Leader for the project.

### Made In Nepal' Could Be Very powerful Branding Tool: US Ambassador To Nepal

"Made in Nepal' could be very powerful branding tool that you should take advantage of," said US Ambassador to Nepal, Aliana B Teplitz speaking at a workshop on 'Enhancing Nepal-US Trade by Utilizing Trade Preference Program' jointly organized by Pavilion Group and the US Embassy in Nepal.

"This trade preference program creates an opportunity to expand the trade between the two countries. Nepali exporters and businesses have duty-free access only until 2025 to the US market for certain kinds of Nepali exports," said ambassador Teplitz, urging the private sector and businesses to take advantage of 'this unique program'.

According to data of the Office of the US Trade Representative, Nepal exported a total of \$89 million of goods to the US in 2016 while the total import stood at \$41 million, running a trade surplus of \$48 million. Out of the total export, Nepal exported \$6.75 million of goods under the duty-free tariff benefits as part of the trade preference program. My Republica reports the US ambassador was optimistic that the volume of export under the trade preference program could be significantly increased in the near future.



"The market potential for these products is obviously much greater. And, we hope that the 6.75 million can be doubled, if not tripled or quadrupled in the near future," said ambassador Teplitz.

"If more Nepali products are exported to the US, there would be high demand for these products," she said:

“Made in Nepal’ could be very powerful branding tool that you should take advantage of.”

Also speaking at the event, Minister for Industry, Sunil Bahadur Thapa, said that there was nothing in the list of 77 products enjoying the duty-free access that could not be possibly produced and exported to the US.

Chandra Kumar Ghimire, Secretary of Ministry of Commerce, said that enhancing the capacity of the small and micro enterprises to produce quality goods was a must to optimize the privilege provided by the US government in accessing the duty-free market.

**ADB To Help Improve Urban Services, Infrastructure**

The Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Board of Directors has approved a \$150 million loan to help improve the delivery of urban services and infrastructure in 8 municipalities in the southern parts of Nepal, including in Province 7 in the far



west. The project will help them become more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient places to live in for more than 1.5 million people.

"Improving urban infrastructure and service delivery in major urban areas in Nepal, including in the Terai region, is a must given their importance to the country's economy and development," said Vivian Castro-Wooldridge, an ADB Urban Development Specialist. "Toward these aims, the project will ensure that people in the southern parts of Nepal are living in areas that are safe, sustainable, inclusive, and resilient to climate change."

**RIA IME Announces Lucky Draw Winner**

RIA IME has announced the winners for lucky draw, 'Dashain Tiharma IME Garnuhos Ghar Sajaunuhos', campaign which was organized on the occasion of Dashain and Tihar in Malaysia.

Issuing a press release, the remittance company said that winners were selected through a software-based lucky draw.

According to the release, the first lucky winner is Rammadi Bhattarai. Bhattarai had sent Rs.32,053 through RIA IME, Malaysia. The amount was transacted through Avhiyan Bachat and Cooperatives based in Sindhupalchok.

Right through the beginning of the establishment of the company, it has been bringing various schemes to attract people around and distributing various bumper gift hampers.

"During this 60- day campaign starting from September 1, all IME customers abroad will get a chance to win home appliances such as washing machine, refrigerator, LED TV, Microwave Oven, stand fan in Bumper Lucky Draw," the release said.

A total of 5 lucky winners will be awarded. In order to collect the gift hampers, respective winners have to contact RIA IME located at Malaysia ■

**HOTEL YAK & YETI**

**At 40**

*Hotel Yak & Yeti celebrates its 40th anniversary*

Nepal's tourism sector has seen many changes in the last four decades with new hotels and new infrastructure. Established forty years ago in an old Rana Palace, Hotel Yak & Yeti has established itself in the international tourism market as a five star quality hotel at the heart of the city

In the last forty years, many star hotels have come to Kathmandu. However, Hotel Yak & Yeti has maintained its own image in the tourism sector. With its glorious history, the hotel has made immense contributions to Nepal's tourism sector.

Hotel Yak & Yeti marked the 40th anniversary of its spirit to serve the customers. The hotel completed 40 years of its operation as a leading luxury hotel on 27th September 2017.

Radhe Shyam Saraf, chairman of the hotel, started Hotel Yak & Yeti the World Tourism Day back in 1977. With a history and mystery of Ranas in it, the hotel has an exquisite charm and maintains sophistication in the ample grounds of the over 100 years- old palace.



The hotel management brought together the celebration of the 40th anniversary in full swing. The event was held in the tranquil Madhuban garden decked up with Nepali decor. The hospitality, as always, was unbeatable with Nepali touch and authentic Nepali food. The food was segregated into regions of Nepal; Himal, Pahad and Terai.

The beautiful hostesses with different ethnic dresses were standing in every corner to demonstrate the Nepalese vibes to expats, delegates and local corporate members present in the event.

The show also had cultural performances demonstrating Arati (Hindu), Newari, Bhojpuri and Sherpa cultures. Ms. Monika Petra Scheiblauer shared that she is very glad to be a part of the hotel, which is a living cultural heritage in the heart of Kathmandu. She thanked all the companies and guests who have supported the property and added the management will always strive to exceed the customer's expectations. Golden, against the setting sun, was the reminiscence of the menu of the year 1977, which was held at Sunrise Restaurant.

The hotel showcased and offered the exact menu at the Sunrise Restaurant and the exact prices used back in that time. The menu consisted of Mulligatawny Soup (Rs. 22), Sunrise Club Sandwich (Rs. 40), Plain Dosa (Rs. 22) and Kheer Badam (Rs. 24). Having a long international exposure and experience, the hotel will further enhance its image under the new General Manager Ms. Monika Petra Scheiblauer ■

# Confusing Political Developments

The last leg of local elections held in Province-2 on September 18 was very successful in that it was held in a relatively peaceful environment with a massive turnout (77 percent) of voters, which is also the highest among all the three phases of local polls. Expectedly, CPN-UML, which remained at the top in the previous phases of local polls, did not do well and remained well behind its major rival party (NC) at number 5. Despite being at the top in Province-2, the NC stalwarts, with only 40 seats in their bag and mayoral electoral defeat in important places like Birgunj and Janakpur, could not get into a celebration mood. They were also unhappy that their wish of making up the loss suffered in the earlier two phases by winning 75 percent of the seats in Province-2 could not be actualized and NC had to be behind UML in the total provincial count. The Election Commission (EC) and Nepal government, more specifically, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, must have been happy that the much debated election was over peacefully and the controversial decision to postpone election in this province was not wrong. Little bit of happiness that a relieved Deuba may have shared with his associates, however, did not last long as the news of unification of the three parties- CPN UML, CPN (Maoist Center) and Naya Shakti Party was made public on October 3. It may be mentioned that in a dramatic turn of events, the chiefs of three left political parties announced that their parties will forge an electoral alliance to contest the upcoming elections for parliament and the provincial assemblies as their first joint task. The three leaders also inked a six-point deal on forging an electoral alliance, forming committees and task-forces to finalize the unification, preparing a joint manifesto for upcoming elections, preparing a party statute and other documents, and not trading blame in the transitional period, among other things. Although those close to the three parties claim that the leftist alliance was long in the making with Bamdev Gautam as a mediator and close confidant of the two chairmen (Oli and Prachanda) until the deal was struck, this announcement, which came just a month ahead of provincial assembly and parliamentary elections, has left the ruling party scrambling. NC leaders are holding meetings, both intra and inter party, at various levels and have concluded that the step taken by the Maoist Centre is unethical and in breach of a previous electoral alliance understanding with NC. It is difficult to disagree with the



BY DR. TILAK RAWAL

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***Yadav and Thakur have the advantage of bargaining with NC from a position of strength because they know well that if what happened in Province-2 local elections could be extended to other parts of Madhes, the two parties together can emerge as a post-election major political force capable enough to bargain for the top executive post of the country.***

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opinion of some NC leaders that the Centre's decision to forge alliance with the main opposition without withdrawing support to the government is politically unethical but the matter to be noted seriously is whether values and ethics still have any space in our politics? The answer definitely is a big No! Therefore, small wonder smart players like Prachanda are often seen outsmarting both collaborators and rivals alike, depending on the situation. In the face of electoral debacles and the eroding image of his party, he is often seen taking resort to these kind of political manoeuvres to keep himself and his party up and alive. Prachanda must have seen expected benefits from this alliance outweighing the benefit being reaped from

the current arrangement with NC. It was a well calculated move and no amount of efforts from NC could stop Prachanda from getting into this arrangement. Deuba did everything humanly possible to keep coalition partners, especially Maoist Center, in good humour, adding ministers at their will to make his Cabinet the largest ever in Nepal's

history with 56 members in it. He also conceded many other demands of the coalition partners, at times even at the cost of annoying his senior partners in the party. He took the criticism, both at home and abroad, on the size of government with a pinch of salt. His interaction with students at Columbia, while in the United States to attend the UN general assembly, was interesting, which touched upon the size issue as well. Indeed, Deuba did everything possible not to let Prachanda run away from him. It was not a bolt from the blue. The NC leaders are free to say that this sudden political development has pushed the country towards polarization but fact of the matter is that they are left with no choice but to form an alliance of the like-minded party to contest the remaining elections at the federal and province level, which could be affected as the possibility of a cabinet reshuffle by Deuba to drop Ministers representing the Maoist Centre or moving a no-confidence motion against the government by the duo (Oli\Prachanda) is wide open. More than anything else the two blocks are currently engaged in wooing parties to get majority of lawmaker on their side. Somewhat forced into the

task of forming an alliance, NC has accelerated consultations with different parties of which the Sanghiya Samjbadhi Forum-Nepal (SSF-N) and the Rastriya Janata Party-Nepal (RJP-N) are the noted ones. It may be recalled that the SSF-N



and RJP-N bagged 26 and 25 wins, securing number 2 and 3 positions respectively in Province-2 local polls. Prime Minister Deuba held discussion even with Rastriya Parjatantra Party (RPP) chair Kamal Thapa who had accused the Deuba-led government of engineering the vertical split in his party leading to the creation of RPP led By Pashupati Rana. While RJP-N is said not to be in consultation with the left alliance, Upendra Yadav-led SSF-N is reported to be in regular contact with the left leaders. While both sides are trying hard to bring the SSF-N into their fold, the two Madhesh-based parties have formed an electoral alliance for the federal and provincial polls which could dent the ruling NC's plan to form a democratic alliance to counter the recent left initiative. The SSF-N and the RJP-N have announced that they would contest the polls, scheduled for November 26 and December 7, jointly. It is interesting that these two parties were said to be making necessary preparations to join the NC-led alliance and had even participated in a meeting to discuss matters with NC just one day after the news of left alliance was made public. These two parties have, however, not yet closed the door on NC because they have made it clear that any alliance with other political parties and fronts will be forged jointly. In the present context, it is likely that these two parties will choose NC-led alliance if they decide to go for a broader alliance. NC is still in talks with like-minded parties and is not likely to reach any conclusion soon on division of First-Past-the-Post constituencies, despite the urgency to form an alliance to counter the challenges posed by the left alliance. Yadav and Thakur have demanded 57 out of the 165 parliamentary



Madheshi Leaders

positions and they want 24 positions in Province-2 alone, leaving NC and other parties in discussion with only 8 seats. Their order is no less tall in case of allocations related to provincial elections. Despite the difficult demand, NC cannot show them the door because the NC stalwarts know very well that any alliance formed without the two Madhes-based parties in it would be meaningless from the standpoint of provincial and parliamentary elections because other parties showing interest to cooperate may not be able to help themselves, let alone being of any help to Deuba-led NC. Yadav and Thakur have the advantage of bargaining with NC from a position of strength because they know well that if what happened in Province-2 local elections could be extended to other parts of Madhes, the two parties together can emerge as a post-election major political force capable enough to bargain for the top executive post of the country. Deuba and his associates have to realize that their party is little bit awkwardly placed after the formation of the left alliance and also runs the risk of being isolated without any mention-worthy alliance partner for the elections. Let us see how NC handles the difficult and delicate situation that it is in currently.

In the ongoing struggle for power, major parties will have to make sure that their activities in no way affect the planned federal and provincial elections. In this context, the Election Commission is right in urging the political parties, government and other stakeholders not to indulge in activities that could affect the elections. Prachanda is quoted

saying repeatedly that his party does not intend to topple the government despite the new political development but has also made it clear lately that his party would quit the government should Prime Minister Deuba decide so. If the prevailing election environment is not to be disturbed, it would be wise for Deuba not to listen to the advice of some NC leaders that the ministers representing the Maoist Centre should be removed. It would be wise to keep the Cabinet untouched until the elections are over because the en block ouster is bound to invite immediate retaliatory move by the left alliance making the situation more instable. A recent decision by RPP to extend support to the government, however, has increased the chance of a reshuffle very soon. It is interesting that RPP decided to extend support exactly two months after it quit this government. In the fast changing political scenario, NC, instead of accusing the left alliance as being against national unity and democratic system and could affect constitution implementation and the peace process, should accept the political challenge positively and prepare itself for the uphill political battle with the powerful-looking left alliance. Thanks to the political development, NC seems to be trying to unite in a genuine way and the criticism of Deuba's observations made at different fora, both within and outside of Nepal, has also subsided. Let us now talk a bit about the attention-seeking economy.

Expectedly, the World Bank (WB) has revised downward Nepal's economic growth forecast for the current fiscal year at 4.5 percent. It had previously stated that Nepal would grow by 5 percent in the year which began on July 16. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) also agrees

that the growth rate will decline to less than 5 (4.5 to 4.7) percent this year. These forecasts are way lower than the government's estimate of 7.2 percent. The recent floods have been cited as the major culprit, which has affected over 80 percent of land in Southern Tarai, Nepal's food basket. Crops grown on 64000 hectares are reported to have been destroyed, which will lead to a notable decline in agricultural output this fiscal year. The multilateral body also expects activities in many sectors to be affected by political uncertainty. Services will continue to remain the main driver of growth but will grow more slowly than in previous years. Capital expenditure stands at Rs.4.91 billion in the first two months of the current fiscal year and may decelerate in days to come basically on account of the likely heavy engagement of the concerned in election related activities, which will check both development activities and expenditure. Revenue has also not grown satisfactorily in the first two months of the current fiscal. We can simply wish government success in realizing its recent claim that the high growth rate of last fiscal year can be achieved this fiscal too. In the meanwhile, authorities at our central bank must be happy that Inflation has dipped to a twelve-year low at a time when even massive election-related unproductive expenses would not be able to push it too high. May Lord Pashupatinath continue to save us!

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

# Sudden Twist

By KESHAB POUDEL

After the announcement of two big communist parties, CPN-UML and Maoist Center, to form a communist alliance for the forthcoming elections all of a sudden, the Nepali politics has entered into a new phase of political turmoil and uncertainty.

Frustrated from the unexpected announcement, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba responded immediately by summoning the meeting of non-communist parties to form another alliance to challenge the communists.

With less than two months away for the election and with the tenure of Legislature Parliament ending, the formation of new alliances is likely to bring many ripples before the elections.

Despite joining the new

With no sign of resignation, Prime Minister Deuba has a few options left. He can either sack the ministers for a cabinet reshuffle or request the Maoist ministers to resign.

Both the options are hard. The president, vice president, speaker of Legislature Parliament and Chief Election Commissioner, who are all nominees of CPN-UML and Maoist Center, are unlikely to endorse Prime Minister Deuba's political move just a few weeks before the poll.

Nepali Congress is reportedly making efforts to postpone the provincial and central elections for a month given its unprepared situation. CPN-UML leader K.P. Sharma Oli and Maoist Center leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal have already issued a warning to Nepali Congress leader Deuba not to take any hasty decision that will affect

the Chief Election Commissioner declines to postpone the elections for a few weeks, a big political vacuum will be created pushing the country into further uncertainty.

With the support of RPP, the government has now 300 plus MPs for a majority. Given this strength, the prime minister can replace the Maoist ministers with RPP and Madhesh members.

At a time when the Maoist Center is holding the key portfolios, including the Ministry Home and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister is considering to remove them and reduce the risk of manipulation of police and district administration in favor of the Maoist alliance.

With so many turbulences at work, Nepal's politics is so fragile that anything can happen any time. The political developments may be unfolding so fast that no one can



communist alliance, the Maoist-Center declared that it continues to be a part of the government. However, Nepali Congress leaders have publicly made it clear that ministers representing Maoist Center should resign from the cabinet.

the government and elections.

With their showing in the local level elections, CPN-UML and Maoist Center are vehemently opposed to any move to postpone the forthcoming elections. If the president declines to accept any reshuffle, which is very likely, and if

say anything for sure about the future course.

Although CPN-UML, which fought the local elections alone against NC and Maoist Center, has paid a heavy price with 40 percent share to Maoist Center, CPN-UML leaders hold the view that it will pay



them more than others in the alliance to be a major party following the elections.

The sudden development surprised many. Even India, a broker of present political process since facilitating the 12-point agreement between Nepali Congress and Maoist, expressed surprise.

Some Indian scholars even see the new communist alliance in Nepal as the reaction to the BJP rightists upsurge in India. However, one has to see it closely that Maoist Party gained much ground in Nepal during the BJP's earlier tenures. Given that bitter experience, it is not surprising to see the rise of communist in Nepal at a time of rightists BJP governing India.

Although this new alliance ends the 12-point agreement signed in New Delhi between present political actors and Maoist, it will have other political fallouts as well.

At a time when the Chinese are asserting their influence in South Asia, formation of new communist alliance in Nepal will change the political landscape in the region if the new alliance secures the majority.

However, the alliance is a group of strange bedfellows. Former Prime Minister and Maoist ideologue Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, who quit Maoist Center two years ago saying that there is no future for communists, joined with the rest of the communist leaders. Similarly, hardcore Madheshi leader Hridayesh Tripathy chose the Surya Symbol, UML's symbol, as his election symbol. A year ago Tripathy termed CPN-UML a group of killers responsible for killing 60 Madheshis.

Another surprising thing is that CPN-UML leader Oli, who termed Maoist Center leader Prachanda as a foreign stooge, is hugging with him, now declaring him a great leader.

Similarly, Kamal Thapa, who accused PM Deuba for conspiring to split his party, is joining Deuba's democratic alliance in another interesting development. Similarly, the alliance of RJP-Nepal and Federal Socialist Forum, Nepal, is also interesting.

Nepal's political forces do not have any common stand and until a few days ago, nobody could expect that they would join forces. As in the past what can be expected in

the coming days will be any unexpected outcome.

#### **Options**

After getting the support from RPP, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has the upper hand. Although Prime Minister Deuba's decision can put the country into major political turmoil and chaos, he can sack Maoist Center ministers and induct members of his own alliance.

He can recommend for the postponement of elections for a few more weeks citing the reason of law and order. After the killing of the chairman of Contractor's Association, Deuba will have ample justification to do so.

Similarly, the communist alliance can preempt all the moves of Deuba playing the president, speaker and chief election commissioner cards. The Chief Election Commissioner has already made it clear that he is ready to bat the Maoist ball.

Provided some wise decision and backing of others, Nepal's politics will be moving towards another phase of uncertainty, ending the present constitution promulgated two years ago. Whether communists unite or divide themselves, it is always a harbinger of political instability. ■

# A Quarter Millennium Of Nepal's Statehood

How many states were on the world map when Nepal emerged as a modern state? Not more than twenty-one. That was in the year 1768 A.D., the year when Kathmandu, the central city-state of the capital valley was integrated into this country as the foundation-stone of this State-Nation-in-making, starting the evolution of a nationhood that is still underway. At least, this is what history tells us. But history is also telling us that our country is about to complete a quarter millennium of its existence.

Yet, if a survey is done about how many of Nepal citizens could say they know, one can be more or less sure that less than .003 percent of them would give a nod. For instance, a very quick survey of the top literati of Kathmandu city revealed recently that out of twenty-five people asked whether they know that the bicentenary of Nepali state was observed in the year 1968 AD (B.S. 2025), barely three said they know.

Such historic amnesia not only reflects how poorly we are being socialized, it also signals and signals in a very sad way that we are not really serious about our historic heritage. That our country stands in the top tenth position in the global comity of states today is certainly a matter we can be proud of. Apart from the fact that 2018 also marks the first centenary of Tri-Chandra College, a great milestone in the history of education of this country, it also completes the second centenary of the birth of Karl Marx, a humanitarian philosopher who scored highest (28% of the votes) when BBC did a survey in the year 2000 of the top 20 philosophers of the world.



BYANANDADITYA

Isn't all this a matter to celebrate?

But why should we, if we decide to, celebrate, how, and what difference would it make?

Celebrating Quarter Millennium (Quarterlennium) will not only be a test of our symbolic capability. Nepal as a state has somehow weathered a whole series of conflicts, crises, and political turmoils in the course of its history, resisting the onslaught of imperial powers to retain its sovereignty

and independence compared to many other states that appeared and disappeared over the past two millennia. This certainly is something every Nepali can be proud of, although it is equally clear that we, as a nation-in-making, have a long long way to go.

Celebrating Quarterlennium is the need of the hour for another reason as well. The political transition from a monarchy to a republican culture demands a whole array of deliberation, dialogue, debate, discourse, and discussion at the mass level before decision can be taken in a rational and legitimate way on the key issues and agendas of the just-born republic, constitution's implementation, democracy, and development. This is what has never been done and cannot be left just to the political parties and government whose role in that regard suddenly cannot be ignored. At a time when the agenda happens to be of restructuring the state itself, such issues and agendas are too important to be left only to the government and the political parties, particularly in view of the stasis, corruption, crime, and paralysis that mark the mode of Nepal's governance culture today. At a time when frantic calls are coming up for secession and when

political consensus even on the key principles and agendas are hard to come by, the celebration can offer a unique opportunity for a large mass of the county's populace to assemble and deliberate, not just to celebrate alone and send out the message in a robust manner that we work together, we stand together, and we will remain together.

Such celebration can bring together thousands of citizens at home and abroad in the towns and villages from the northern Himalayan region and hills to the plains of the south in a meeting of hearts and minds, probably for the first time.

Such congregation can organize events, set up fairs, mount exhibitions, and hold tournaments contests, conclaves, and symposia, even conferences, on a whole range of issues and agendas of concern to democracy and development at various levels - local, national as well as international. The conclusions that might follow the dialogues, debates, and discourses in

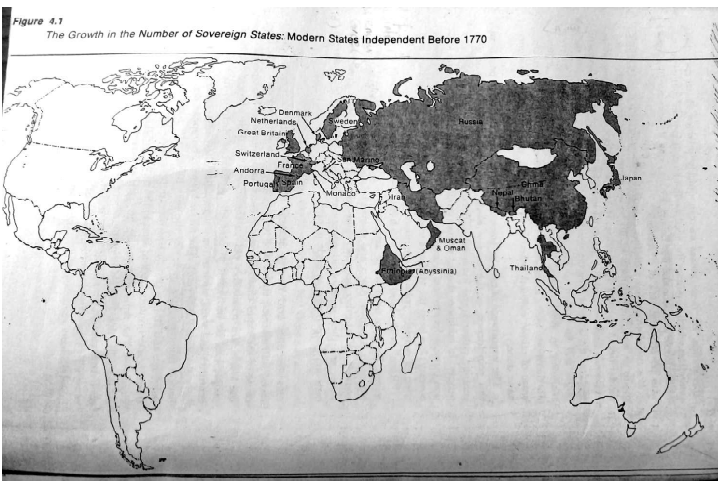


Figure 4.2 The Growth in the Number of Sovereign States: Modern States Independent Before 1770

the wake of the gala celebration could guide the course that our toddler republic takes in the days to come, generating a whole slew of policies, plans, and programmes of immense value.

One way to set the ball rolling would be to spread out QUAM over the whole year, selecting 12 key sectors for the festival, focused separately on the twelve months of the year:

Art, Culture, History, and Heritage, Democracy, Development, Economy, Education, Environment Health, Religion, Science & Technology, Security, Sports, Transport

The advantage of year-long distribution lies in offering the widest possible opportunity to the potential visitors who arrive in Nepal that year - both the NRNs and foreigners - from January to December and pickup the particular month and event of their choice.

Some possible highlights of the Quarterlennium could be:

- Inauguration of a regional centre somewhere in the Saptakoshi corridor for study and research on social and political movements with establishment of an archive and museum, and monument commemorating martyrs who have fallen fighting for the cause of national independence, anti-colonial struggle, human rights and social development or democracy.

- Opening of a wildlife sanctuary.

- A video documentary on Nepal.

- A yearbook on tourism and education.

- Production of quarterlennium giftcraft (souvenirs and memorabilia depicting the country's culture, history, nature, and heritage).

- Special discounts on tourist tariff and facilities by sponsors, host agencies, and tourist organisations that can substantially boost up visitor flow-in through the scale of economy it can augment.

- By way of conclusion, the Quarterlennium can hold an international conclave of intellectuals along with a commemoration evening to honor social icons, achievers, and persons who have served the country as aliens or citizens in some significant way and whose contribution we cannot forget.

The central leitmotif of the festival, of course, is to make it a Festival of Citizens, as the chance of a lifetime for every participant. Since the state in Nepal may have never attempted a celebration on the

scale imagined here, ideas will have to be invited from home and abroad on the means and methods in an idea bank of sorts to streamline the event. All in all, the celebration could then turn out to be a rewarding moment for every participant.

To operationalize Quarterlennium, it seems sensible, indeed, necessary, to set up an Alliance for Quarter-Millennium with a Steering Committee as its core executive planning body. A high-level Trust, membered by celebrities of national and international eminence, may have to be formed to direct the flow of events, through consensus or a predominant majority vote of the Alliance set up for a fixed tenure of five to 10 years. Sponsors from professional agencies will have to be sought to fund the resource inputs and volunteers from a large range of schools, campuses, associations, and NGOs must come forward to man the event.


(Anand Aditya is a political scientist) ■

# हाम्रो चाहाना :

# दुर्व्यसनरहित स्वस्थ र

# सुखी जीवनको

## कामना



नेपाल सरकार

सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय

सूचना विभाग

## EPG MEET

# Talking Shop

*The recent statement issued by the Nepalese members of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) shows who determines Nepal's foreign policy*

By KESHAB POUDEL

With the fifth round of talks concluded, the members of the Eminent Persons Group of Nepal and India EPG are taking up various bilateral issues, which have many long and short-term implications in the ties between the two countries.

As the members of the Indian side remained quiet, rarely making any of their statement public, the Nepali members briefed the press as if they determined the Nepal's policy decisions with India.

When formal diplomatic mechanisms headed by foreign secretaries of both the countries failed to address the crucial issues of Nepal and India relations, how could one expect to deal with such complex issues from a non-formal entity, which does not even have a dedicated channel of communication with the government?

Constituted three years ago by then UML and Maoist Alliance government led by K.P. Sharma Oli, Nepalese members represented in EPG are ideologically dominated by communists whose views about Nepal's relations with India are an open secret.

Interestingly, three governments have changed in the last two years, but what has not changed is any member of the communist-dominated Eminent Persons Group (EPG).

Even at a time when the government is led by NC Sher Bahadur Deuba, the EPG composition has not changed. Although any issue related to the border will directly impact the life of the Madheshi, no party from Madhesh is raising the question.

Interestingly, out of four members represented in EPG, three members have clearly one or the other affiliation with the communist parties, which are known for their anti-Indian stand.

Among four members, representing the Nepalese team, Nilamber Acharya, Surya Nath Upadhyaya, and Dr. Rajan Bhattarai were close to the Communist Party of Nepal at one or the other time. Among

the three, Bhattarai is a seating member of parliament representing CPN-UML.

From the Indian side, the members consist of politicians Bhagat Singh Koseri, former chief minister of Uttarakhand, Professor Dr. Mahendra P.Lama, from West Bengal, professor from Jaipur Dr. B.C Uprety and seasoned diplomat and former ambassador to Nepal Jayanta Prasad.

In dealing with such a strong Indian team, Nepal has even failed to appoint any seasoned former diplomat in the committee. With so many professional diplomats in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the government should have picked up some career diplomat to strengthen the committee.

Strangely, no government has taken issue with this publicly or officially even as the members have been discussing Nepal-India 1950

"No man's land has been encroached from the Indian side. Nepali side is also found to have encroached the 'no-man's land' in some places," said a member of the EPG from Nepal side Dr. Rajan Bhattarai. He said that the Nepali side has proposed removing illegal structures along the border in line with the existing international standards.

While Nepal and India share the border and some associated disputes in different places, the illegal structures built on the no-man's land have also caused the disputes drag on between the two countries.

"We have proposed making the border secure," said Dr. Bhekh Bahadur Thapa, head of EPG. "Nepal-India border needs to be regulated, not closed, to stop illegal activities along the bordering areas. We need to understand the definition of an open border of the past in the changed context."



treaty and other agenda with India.

"Even EPG members did not get consent or briefing from prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and Foreign Ministry before pushing Nepal's agenda," said a close aid of Prime Minister Deuba on condition of anonymity. "We learned from the media about the decision taken by the EPG."

During the fifth Eminent Persons Group (EPG) meeting that concluded in Kathmandu, Nepali side made a proposal to maintain international standards and ensure scientific management of the border between the two countries.

However, Indian representatives did not say anything about the meeting. Even Jayanta Prasad did not come to join in. "We are here to listen to the voice of Nepal and we are ready to do what Nepal wants," head of Indian team Koseri said.

At a time when Nepal's foreign ministry and its own institution is capable to handle all kinds of diplomatic issues and elected prime minister Deuba has his own team, EPG's stand in the present context is no more than a talking shop. While making comments and recommending changes, EPG must keep in mind that their recommendations are subject to people's comment and subject to acceptability of the government. ■

# Nepal's Politics: Red Versus Rest

The coming together of like-minded people or political parties driven by a common ideology and principles would generally be taken as a welcome move. But a sudden declaration last week by three prominent left parties that they will contest the federal and parliamentary elections scheduled for November 26 and December 7 as allies and that the alliance is a precursor towards the formation of a single communist party has triggered skepticism. In response, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, also the chairman of the Nepali Congress (NC), has initiated a move to bring together all non-left parties to counter the communists.

Nepal has been through political instability, frequent change of government and political equations in the past 11 years. This is not for the first time that the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist Centre) and the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist have come together - they have joined hands to form a government in the past. What no one anticipated were the moves to form a single party. When Maoist chief Pushpa Kamal Dahal and CPN-UML chief K.P. Oli announced the pre-poll alliance and subsequently the merger move on Tuesday, even cadres and mid-rank leaders were taken by surprise. Why did such a move come without enough debate in the party ranks? And why was the alliance and merger plan made in such a conspiratorial manner?

The first response to the tremor, expectedly, was felt in Delhi. The government of Nepal, especially the Prime Minister's Office, was expecting that New Delhi will officially announce the date of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Kathmandu in less than two weeks - the third in three years and the first after the Indian blockade made him unpopular in Nepal - ostensibly to lay the foundation of the India-funded 900-MW hydro project. Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Nepal in October 2016 was called off at the last minute as the Oli-led government that China considered very friendly had quit three months before, following the defection of the Maoists to form a new coalition government with the NC. The Indian establishment as well as a section of the pro-India political class in Nepal had hailed the formation of the NC-CPN (Maoist Centre) alliance as indication of New Delhi's success in promoting democracy and its own interest in Nepal. Two months ago during Deuba's state visit, Modi had heaped praise on the maturity of Deuba and Dahal,



BY YUBARAJ GHIMIRE

ostensibly for pursuing the political equation that India had helped to construct and pulling the rug off Oli's feet.

When Dahal ditched Deuba and joined ranks with Oli, it marked the failure of India's Nepal policy, yet again. This is, arguably, New Delhi's biggest diplomatic failure since it brought the Maoists to the centre stage of Nepali politics. Not only was the monarchy, the oldest cultural and diplomatic link between India and Nepal, sacrificed for this purpose, but the oldest democratic force of Nepal, the NC, a party

that was active in India's freedom struggle, was forced to play a secondary role, having told by India to back Maoist agendas with reservation. In fact, the NC, all along believed that a constitutional monarchy and democratic forces working together was the best

guarantor for Nepal's independent existence and economic stability. That belief was at the core of the constant refusal of B.P. Koirala, the legendary founder leader of the party, to launch a pro-democracy movement in the country. Instead, he gave a call for national reconciliation in December 1976. Throughout his political career, Koirala followed the mantra that "my neck is tied with the king". Is Koirala's prophecy coming true? The NC has never been so weak and confused in its seven-



Prachanda (left) and Oli

decade long existence.

Following the Maoists and their agenda under India's mediation has forced the NC to go on the defensive. New Delhi's assessment that the Maoists "are the real representatives of Nepalese people" has been proved wrong as the party, 11 years after joining the peace process, has accepted the status of a junior ally in the CPN-UML led Left alliance, content with 40 per cent of seats as against 60 per cent seats to the UML.

The new Left alliance may not officially assume an anti-India posture, but their worldview is fairly well-known. The Chinese ambassador to Nepal recently stated that Beijing wants to be the biggest stakeholder in Nepal. But all these issues will take time to become clear.

While the future of the three former prime ministers - Oli, Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai - together in one single party is still unclear, they at least have similar pasts. All three had begun their political career by practicing a politics of "annihilation of class enemies" - Oli in the 1970s and Dahal and Bhattarai in the 1990s.

Courtesy: Indian Express ■

## ECONOMY

# A Slowdown

*Three international multilateral banks announce that Nepal's economic growth will be likely to go below five percent next year*

By A CORRESPONDENT

After recording a high growth of over 7 percent last year, Nepal is likely to see a slowdown in economic growth for this year. Largely due to the damage caused by floods, the pace of economic growth will be below 5 percent instead of the 7.2 percent growth the government is expecting.

"The pace of growth of Nepal's economy will slow down to 4.7% in fiscal year 2018, compared to 6.9% seen in FY2017," according to the latest economic report. The FY2018 growth forecast has been revised down from an earlier estimate of 5.4% in the wake of severe floods and landslides in August that affected one thirds of the country, resulting in the loss of human lives and livelihoods, and destruction of crops, says the Nepal Macroeconomic Update 2017. Asian Development Bank, Nepal Resident Mission, recently released the second edition of the Update for September 2017 with a forecast for FY2018 growth and inflation.

The report also analyzes Nepal's performance in real, fiscal, monetary and external sectors in FY2017. GDP is forecast to grow by 4.7% in FY2018, down from a preliminary estimate of 6.9% in FY2017, largely due to heavy rainfall during this monsoon that affected paddy and other major crops in the Terai belt of Nepal.

This will likely depress farm output and economic growth in FY2018 and contribute to inflationary pressure. Inflation is expected to rise to 6.5% in FY2018. With widening trade deficit and falling growth in remittances, current account deficit is expected to widen to 2.2% of GDP in FY2018 from a deficit of 0.4% of GDP in FY2017. The Issue Focus of this edition sheds light on prospects of Nepal's services trade and suggests sector-specific policy recommendations.

According to Asian Development Bank, Nepal Resident Mission, the second edition of Nepal Macroeconomic Update (September 2017), says the agriculture sector was badly hit, and will likely expand by just 2.4% in FY2018, compared to 5.3% in FY2017 owing to destruction of paddy plantation and other major crops in the Terai belt of Nepal. But

the industry sector is expected to expand by 6.6% in FY2018 thanks to a better supply of electricity and availability of construction materials. The services sector, meanwhile, is projected to grow by 5.5% in FY2018, resulting from an expansion of the financial intermediation, wholesale and retail trade, and tourism subsectors.

"The economy rebounded strongly in FY2017 from FY2016, a difficult year with external shocks. This year we expect economic growth to revert somewhat to the trend growth rate, partly because of floods. Reforms to improve the quality of public and private

for FY2012-2017, its year-on-year growth has remained solid. The low execution rate could well be an indication of an overambitious target set by the government, the report says.

Growth in merchandise exports has been weaker than the rise in imports, leading to a widening merchandise trade deficit. The growth in remittances is expected to drop following a decline in the number of workers going abroad in FY2017. Nepal increasingly faces the risk of external sector instability with a slower rise in remittances and ballooning merchandise trade deficit.

The growth in services exports, on the other hand, has been brighter. The



investment and to encourage a competitive private sector would reduce the economy's dependence on external factors such as the monsoon and prospects for remittances," said Sharad Bhandari, Principal Economist and Officer-in-Charge of ADB's Nepal Resident Mission.

The Update says inflation is expected to rise moderately to 6.5% in FY2018 from 4.5% in FY2017, partly reflecting lower inflation in India and the expansionary FY2018 budget. The fiscal transfer and election expenditures compounded by depressed farm output will exert inflationary pressure in FY2018.

Despite improved revenue collection at NPR609.1 billion (23.4% of GDP), the fiscal deficit widened to 5.2% of gross domestic product (GDP) in FY2017 following the rise in government expenditure compared to a year earlier. While the execution rate of capital expenditures has hovered around 72.1%

services sector accounted for 66% of the total exports and 14% of the total imports in FY2017, indicating its growing importance in external trade. But because of infrastructural, institutional, legal, and procedural barriers, the services trade in Nepal has yet to achieve its full potential, the report says.

Similarly The World Bank also predicted that Nepal's growth will slow down to 4.6 percent this year. According to the World Bank, Nepal has seen an impressive economic recovery after disruptions from earthquakes and a trade blockade. Economic activity is expected to rebound to 7.5 percent in 2017 through increasing government resources, spending, and remittances from abroad. Growth is expected to slow in 2018 due to the heaviest floods in decades, slow recovery of exports, and an increase in lending rates. ■



# Emerging Left Alliance: Hopes And Fears

Continued political instability has been a serious issue in Nepal, having 23 governments in the last 25 years. No government after the restoration of multi-party parliamentary system in 1990 has completed its full term of 5 years. No need to mention, the political instability is hampering socio-economic development in the country.

Today, there are 125 plus political parties in Nepal. With this, Nepal will not get a majority government in the near future, nor any coalition government will survive for more than 18 months. I have expressed my views at different times that political restructuring should proceed in parallel with the state restructuring in the country.

Now, the politics has taken a new turn by talks of an electoral alliance and subsequent unity between the CPN (UML), CPN (Maoist Centre) and Naya Shakti Party. They say political stability is on the main agenda. Obviously, there are reasons for their alliance in order to consolidate the left-leaning votes in the federal and provincial elections. This would also mean to ensure the top most positions.

To counter the left alliance, the Nepali Congress is looking to strike a similar alliance of democratic forces for the upcoming provincial and federal parliamentary elections. The Nepali Congress is holding meetings with Rastriya Janata Party (RJP), Sanghiya Samajwadi Forum Nepal, RPP and RPP (Prajatantrik) to discuss the formation of an alliance.

On the surface both these alliances are seen as a way to hold power. There is a past history of coming together and breaking up in the left, right and centrist political parties. There are fears that the alliances will not last long because they do not have common agendas on governance, nationalism and foreign policies. There is an uncertainty.



BY DR. PRABIN MANANDHAR

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**Now, the politics has taken a new turn by talks of an electoral alliance and subsequent unity between the CPN (UML), CPN (Maoist Centre) and Naya Shakti Party. They say political stability is on the main agenda. Obviously, there are reasons for their alliance in order to consolidate the left-leaning votes in the federal and provincial elections. This would also mean to ensure the top most positions.**

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Giving benefit of doubts, the unity amongst the political parties is positive for political stability and development. Nepal does not need more than 3 or 4 political parties. Fewer and stronger parties will have longevity and political maturity over time.

Learning key characteristics of political parties in varied democracies in the world, it's the "feudal character" that breaks the alliances and service delivery at the interest of the common people.

**It requires the following three conditions to be met:**

- Internal democracy: how will the political parties within the alliance conduct business, discharge duties, strengthen decentralization and promote meritocracy in compliance with constitutional provisions?

- Inclusion: how will they within the alliance promote inclusion of party cadres of different caste, class, gender and ethnicities in leadership?

- Financial integrity: how will they within the alliance ensure transparency in party financing and expenses?

It's a historical necessity that Nepal should have political stability. Let's be hopeful that the alliances can work in parallel to fulfill these conditions, and can provide competent leadership with vision, integrity and action.

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

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## QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

# Classical Italian

### *Four Italian musicians play violin to cast a spell in Kathmandu*

By A CORRESPONDENT

Although different musical performances are organized in Kathmandu, classical violin is rare. Thanks to the initiative of the Honorary Consul General of Italy to Nepal Pratima Pande, four renowned Italian musicians, representing Quartetto di Cremona, presented a classical music concert in Kathmandu, winning the hearts and minds of over 200 music lovers.

In their one and half hour performance, musicians Cristiano Gualco, Paolo Andreoli in violin, Simone Gramaglia in viola and Giovanni Scaglione on cello presented various forms of classical western music.

Addressing the program Pratima Pande, Honorary Consul General of Italy to Nepal, said, "It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to listen

to our very famous Italian musicians. Quartetto di Cremona has been travelling and performing around the world. We are very happy that they are with us and will play for us in Kathmandu."

She thanked all different organizations for supporting the program. At the event managed by Malta International, Damiano Francovich, Consul General of Italy to Kolkata and Nepal, highlighted the importance of classical music and expressed his happiness to be a part of the program.



Foreign diplomats based in Kathmandu, honorary consulate generals and music lovers attended the performance at Hyatt Hotel, where Minister of Industry Sunil Bahadur Thapa was present as the chief guest. ■

## Taste Of Italy

It is not often that we get to listen to western classical famous music. Since its formation in 2000, the Quartetto di Cremona has established a reputation as one of the most exciting chamber ensembles on the international stage, playing all over the world and representing their beautiful country. This week they had performances in Kolkata and Delhi.

Italy is the country where the great Renaissance took place influencing the whole of Europe and the world in the arts, sciences, architecture, culture and food. Many gathered here today, have visited Italy and experienced the great cities of Rome, Florence, Venice, Milan and countless other charming places. Many Nepalese students are also studying in Italy, in universities across the country. In Nepal too, there is an Italian community working and residing here, who are present this evening.

Tonight, we in Kathmandu are sincerely looking forward to the taste of Italy, with wonderful classical music performed by our esteemed artists and taste some Italian



BY PRATIMA PANDE

food prepared by the Hyatt Hotel and sample interesting Italian Cocktails and good Italian wine which is provided by Green Line Centre wine which is provided by Green Line Center Pvt. Ltd, our great friend Amit Agrawal, who has been so generous, I would also like to thank Nepal Investment Bank Ltd, who is the main host for the dinner this evening and of course, the Italian government and the Cultural Center in Delhi and the Italian Consulate in Kolkata, Damiano Francovich, for flying in the Quartetto of Cremona to help promote and foster great ties between Nepal and Italy. Thanks to Mr. Damiano, this program has materialized.

I would also like to sincerely thank the Hyatt Hotel and the General Manager Sinead O'Reilly and her hardworking staff for being so helpful and supporting to make this evening a great success and also Bijay Suwal, our event manager of Malta International, and how he has helped in the logistics and planning of this functions.

*(Pande is the honorary consul general of Italy to Nepal. Excerpts of her statement delivered at the musical program.)* ■

## AFTER TWO YEARS OF RECONSTRUCTION

# East Nepal In Shadow

*Despite the distribution of the first installment of the earthquake reconstruction cash grants for private houses, the shortage of construction materials and hike in the price are creating obstructions in the process rebuilding homes in Bhojpur and Dhankuta of the eastern region.*

Mahendra Bahadur Ghimire, 77 of Dhankuta 3, Syawle, has been in a dilemma as to whether to start the reconstruction of his house or not. His simple rural house was totally damaged by the 2015 earthquake. He is still waiting for the technicians to come to his residence for consultation so he can rebuild his house.

Ghimire has been staying in the adjacent cowshed. He has already spent more than two years, along with his five family members, in the cowshed. The cows have been shifted to an open space. He said, "I have been living in this cowshed for more than two years. Still, I am not sure when and how to build my house."

After the earthquake, no one could stay in his house. He got 20 kilograms of rice and Rs. 15,000.00 from the government as a quick relief in the early days. He had nothing to eat at the time so, this was a great help for him. After two years since the earthquake, he got Rs. 50,000.00 (US\$500) last month as the first installment under the reconstruction cash grants from NRA.

Built over twenty six years, his property worth more than six lakh rupees was lost to the quake. He thinks the house that he had earlier would cost no less than one million rupees now. Ghimire, 64, lost his wife recently. With tears in his eyes, he said, "What can I do with that fifty thousand rupees when the market prices of reconstruction materials have gone so high and there is a shortage of construction



BY UMA KANTA KHANAL

materials."

The earthquake victims have been suffering from the attacks of wild animals too. They say they feel insecure from monkeys, snakes and leopards. They have requested to the government to provide the total relief as soon as possible so that they can rebuild their houses.

Ghimire said, "The government should have given at least Rs. 150,000.00 (US\$1500) to initiate the construction of our houses."

Mekh Bahadur Rai of Dhankuta 3 has become an elected local body member of his village ward. He is also an earthquake victim. Even though he is a local representative, he is unable to rebuild his house which was destroyed in the 2015 earthquake. He has been living in a small hut near where his old house was.

He said that there was continuous tremor of earthquake so he had to stay in another hut in which he is still living with six

family members. More than two dozens of houses were destroyed in his locality by that temblor.

As Ghimire did, he secured the first installment Rs. 50,000.00 but he has not been able to start building his new house. Rai said, "What can we do with this little amount? Given the high labor cost, the money is not even enough to clear the debris."

The earthquake victims of Dhankuta got the first installment of relief after the local elections in the district. They are not aware when they will get the rest of the relief fund.

Dhankuta Municipality has decided that the earthquake victims should not pay for the approval of design of the new houses. The first meeting of the municipal board decided the earthquake victims should not pay for the approval of their new house designs. In Dhankuta district, 4491 were surveyed and 2796 are in the beneficiaries are in the list. Out of them 2089 households have already signed the grant agreement and received the first installment.

According to the municipality, there are at least four hundred and fifty houses completely destroyed throughout the district due to the earthquake. The chief of the municipality, Chintan Tamang, said that the amount of the approval will not be taken by the municipality. For the approval of design of the houses, the city dwellers have to pay from three thousand rupees to more than six thousand rupees.



Trucks loaded with Clinker at Kakadvitta customs yard

After two years of the earthquake, the municipality has signed the agreement with the earthquake victims for the relief funds, when the victims of other districts started to get the second installment.

Dhankuta Municipality will provide 300,000.00 rupees for each damaged house in three installments. The city dwellers have started to receive the first installment as per the agreement. After having the solar power in the new house, the victims will get twenty five thousand rupees as the fourth or the last installment.

Out of registered names of 4491, 2796 are listed in the beneficiaries list. According to the Dhankuta District Development Coordination Committee, the government will invest 130 million rupees in the first installment of the relief in the district. Out of them 2089 households have signed the grant agreement and they received the first installment.

The situation of Bhojpur is also bleak. Out of 9242 surveyed, 5749 are listed in the beneficiaries list. Among them 1754 signed the grant agreement and 1537 have already received the first installment.

In Sankhuwasabha district, 1953 are listed as beneficiaries and out of them 1583 have signed the grant agreement and 1201 received the first installment. Solukhumbu is one of the badly damaged districts in eastern Nepal with 11979 in the

beneficiaries list. Out of 8095 who signed the grant agreement, merely 514 received the first installment.

#### **Shortage of Construction of Materials**

Although the import of the construction materials has been rapidly increasing day by day since the 2015 earthquake, there are shortages of the construction materials, including sand, aggregate, brick, cement and boulder. As a result, the reconstruction process has not continued as per the need of the victims. This picture of eastern Nepal shows that the government has failed to provide cash grants for the private houses.

The victims have been waiting for the proper guidance to reconstruct their houses. In some villages of Dhankuta and Bhojpur,

the earthquake victims are still waiting for the technicians to give them instructions to rebuild their house infrastructure. The District Coordination Committee and municipalities of the district are unable to send the technicians in the villages.

Two years have passed since the 2015 earthquake, yet thousands of people remain socially and economically vulnerable, suffering from the manifold effects of the nature-induced disaster in eastern Nepal.

According to the data from the Nepal Reconstruction Authority (NRA) published in September, 765618 quake-affected families have been listed as eligible to receive reconstruction aid. Of them, 640,020 families have since signed the private housing grant agreement



Mekh Bahadur Rai

with the NRA in various districts.

However, only 609,023 families have received the first installment of the housing grant, merely 78435 families have received the second tranche, and only 7459 families have received the third installment.

Unlike the other parts, thousands of victims have remained homeless and are living in makeshift shelters, struggling to resume activities that would enable them to generate a living in eastern region.

"While the government has already generated considerable criticism for its slow pace of reconstruction efforts in the hill regions following the earthquake, it is essential for the government to assume a proactive role and make good on its claims for reconstruction," said Chintan Tamang, newly elected mayor of Dhankuta Municipality.

"Given the present pace of reconstruction, it will take decades for people to move in their own home," said Tamang. "The municipality is considering providing additional support to those who are living in our areas. We are also discussing with local administration to smoothen the supply of construction materials."

#### **What obstruction is there in reconstruction?**

Two years after the devastating earthquakes that struck Nepal, the country is struggling to bounce back. Nearly 70% of the affected people still live in temporary shelters, and it is common to see damaged houses, temples without roofs, and earthquake debris lying here and there in many eastern cities of eastern region and Dhankuta is not an exception.

The recovery is painfully slow, and many families who lost their loved ones continue to live in traumatic conditions. Although the two earthquakes that struck on April 26 and May 12, 2015, did not cause a large number of deaths, many houses were damaged in the eastern region.

Although relief and rescue work began swiftly, with local volunteers working with the army and international aid workers in

central and western region, it took a year to feel the damage of eastern Nepal.

Even after two years, the recovery effort has slowed to a crawl in Dhankuta and Bhojpur.

As other parts of the region, political bickering, a lack of accountability and poor management of funds have all hampered efforts to rebuild. After two years, the people in eastern region see the situation is a "failure".

Following the local elections, many believed that the situation would change. However, the damage caused by more than a decade of political vacuum is huge. The loss of political accountability to local people is one of the key factors of the failure of disaster recovery in Nepal.

In several locations, it is found that unaffected local elites, included in the list of victims, are receiving financial support. Without local democratic leadership, people cannot voice their concerns, mobilize community resources, or scrutinize projects.

Some local leaders have worked with their communities to build infrastructure, small roads, schools



Mahendra Bahadur Ghimire

and hospitals. Nevertheless, these individual efforts are no substitute for strong and democratic local government.

The blockade and political wrangling following the promulgation of new constitution disrupted supplies. As a landlocked country, Nepal has historically relied on India for its basic supplies. The blockade led to an almost total paralysis of not only the recovery work, but the entire economy.

Given the persistent seismic risks in the Himalayas, there is a need to create a coherent regional structure for disaster recovery. Yet internal tensions appear to have prevented the Nepal government from promoting serious international cooperation.

#### **Import of Reconstruction Materials**

Cement import from India has surged exponentially in the last fiscal year, as domestic production was insufficient to fulfill the local demand. Import of cement has doubled in the last fiscal compared to the previous fiscal year,



Dhankuta Buspark

## NEW SPOTLIGHT INVESTIGATION

according to the Department of Customs.

As per cement manufacturers, cement plants with their own clinker producing facility have utilized around 70 to 75 per cent of their capacity and those that import clinker have utilized 60 per cent of their capacity. According to Cement Manufacturers Association of Nepal, of the total 48 cement factories in operation, 14 with their own clinker production plants have cement production

by a large volume. The volume of the last two months of the current fiscal shows that how large the import rate is. The import of cement and clinker was of NRs. 4,24,03,22,000. Among the principal items in reconstruction, the import of iron oxides was 5, 285 kilogram from India and 32, 200 kilogram from China.

The custom officers in the various parts of the country say that the import volumes of these materials have increased after the 2015 earthquake. The custom officer

Bhairawa, the import of the same product is half of this quantity in the first two months of the present fiscal year in Kakarbhitta and Biratnagar.

In Shrawan and Bhadra (July and August) of the present fiscal year, the import of clinker is 6 94 42 030 kilogram. In the same way the import of iron is also the half of the last year's import in the first two months of the present fiscal year.

As many crushers and stone quarries are shut down, there is a scarcity of aggregate and sand. As the floods washed out many brick



Yard of customs office, Kakarvitta

capacity of eight million metric tons, or around 160 million sacks per annum.

Nepal's import of iron and steel jumped by a whopping one hundred percent in the last fiscal year. This is because of the rapid acceleration of construction works across the country. Domestic steel and rod manufacturers have said that this significant surge in import of steel and rod is due to sudden boom in the construction sector in Nepal.

When the reconstruction phase of damaged infrastructure was started, import of construction materials increased

of Mechi Custom Office, Kakarvitta, Jhapa, Ganapati Kadel says that the country is going to be self-dependent in producing cement and other construction materials. "Five years ago, Nepal used to import cement from India but now the import of clinker has become widespread. This shows Nepal has been producing more than before," Kadel said.

The custom office of eastern border point, Kakarvitta has record of 15 27 95 155 kilogram of clinker import from India in the last fiscal year. In general the imports of these products are getting higher in other custom points including Birjung and

factories in terai, there is also a scarcity of bricks in these areas.

Being declared affected by the earthquake in a year, the eastern districts of Bhojpur, Dhankuta and Sankhuwasabha are seeing their reconstruction happen at a snail's pace as several confusions over the distribution of cash grants, in the absence of proper mechanism for communication, prevail.

*Reporting from Bhojpur, Dhankuta and Jhapa*

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## EARTHQUAKE RECONSTRUCTION

# Short Of Materials

*The demand and supply gap has escalated the prices of construction materials, including the locally available products like sand, brick, stone, and aggregate, forcing the rural poor to face an additional burden. The number of sand quarries and crusher industries has increased. The import of construction materials has drastically gone up. Now what has led to the increase in price and scarcity?*

BYACORRESPONDENT

Keshab Prasad Ghimire, 62, a resident of formerly Gotikhel Village Development Committee, which is now Ward No 3, Gotikhel, of



Keshab Prasad Ghimire

Mahakal Village Municipality, is living in an area where more than two dozen crushers break and grind stones. Ghimire, an earthquake victim, who has started the reconstruction of his house, however, faces the shortage of the construction materials in the market.

"There is a scarcity of cement, sand, aggregate and brick. Even the minimum daily wages of unskilled labor is Rs.1000.00 to 1200.00. The cost of 100 cubic foot of sand and aggregate is 10,000.00 and transport cost is between Rs.7000.00-8,000.00. Thousand bricks cost 2500.00 plus VAT. The price of OPC 53 grade cement is Rs. 950.00," said Ghimire, whose village is just 40 kilometers south of the capital.

"The prices of the construction

materials have increased drastically. I think Rs.300,000.00 will not be enough to purchase half of the materials," said Ghimire. "If I

cannot purchase the local materials like sand, aggregate and bricks, how can I purchase other products imported from outside the country."

Kale Sarki, who sees over hundreds loaded trucks with sand and aggregate passing through his own municipality towards

Kathmandu, had to wait for a week to purchase 50 cubic foot (CFT) of aggregate and sand. Sarki, a resident of Mundan Deupur Municipality, Ward No. 8 of Kavre, paid almost double the price to transport the materials.

"I have already spent Rs.500,000. to purchase the aggregate, brick, sand, cement, iron rods and woods. I have yet to buy galvanized sheet for roof," said Sarki. "For a small three room house, I expect that I need to spend more than 700,000 rupees."

Even the chief district coordinator of Dolakha District accepts the fact that there are shortages of locally available construction materials.

"As many earthquake victims

are in the process of receiving the second installment under the private housing grant, the scarcity of the locally available construction materials is likely to delay the process of reconstruction," said Sagar Acharya, the National Reconstruction Authority's district coordinator of Dolakha. "After consultations with experts, the government is planning to open three more stone and sand quarries in the district."

The cost of transporting construction materials is very high in Kavreplanchwok. "With support from the District Administration, we have been making every effort to maintain the supply of construction materials and prices," said Dhruba Gaida, coordinator of National Reconstruction Authority's Kavrepalanchwok district coordinator.

The price of all construction materials, brick, cement, steel, Corrugated Galvanized Iron (CGI) sheet, aggregate, wood and sand has jumped in all the districts from east to west.

Along with Lalitpur and Kavre, the construction materials are in short supply all over earthquake affected districts.

According to an estimate, the construction cost of a standard three-room house, with 431 square feet, is around Rs.608,931. Similarly, a house of two rooms, 313 square feet, costs Rs.537,000. and small two rooms, 232.88 square feet, cost Rs.412,000.

For three rooms, out the total amount, Rs.235893.000 is required to purchase local materials like brick,



Kale Sarki

aggregate, sand, stone, brick and wood. The 185,000,000 is for skill and unskilled labors. It means half of the money for the reconstruction of private house circulates in the local market.

Similarly, Rs.188,038 will be for non-local materials, including 53 grade OPC cement, which costs Rs. 68,250 and 12 mm f steel, 10 mm f steel and 7 mm f steel 348 KGs. This will cost about Rs.23,000. The current price of steel is around Rs. 85 to 12 mm and 95 to 4 mm f. per bundle CGI Sheet of 12 feet cost Rs.6500.00 and plain GI Sheet per rim is 350.00.

#### **Demand supply**

According to a study conducted by Practical Action Regional office, titled Supply Chain of Construction Materials in Earthquake Affected Districts and Assessment in Nuwakot and Rasuwa, the change in peoples' preference of building types following the earthquake increased the demand of construction materials.

Before the earthquake, more than 80 per cent of the buildings were stone masonry in mud mortar. However, in accessible areas, majority of houses (52%) are likely to be brick masonry in cement mortar. On the other hand, inaccessible areas, more (79%) are likely to be stone masonry in mud mortar. Corrugated Galvanized Iron (CGI) sheet is the most popular roofing material, irrespective of the areas with 81 per cent of households preferring it.

With the change of building construction, the high price of non-local materials is the primary cause of concern.

"On the top of it, the transaction

cost is huge. A bag of cement, which costs NPR 630 at the factory in Birgunj, is sold at NPR 890 at rural VDC of Nuwakot. The exorbitant transportation fare is the major contributor for the transaction cost," said the report.

The study has shown that there is a demand of 9.78 billion pieces of brick. But the current capacity is 3.08 billion bricks with installed capacity 3.08 bricks. Similarly, CGI sheet's total demand is of 0.30 metric tons, current supply capacity is 0.35 and installed capacity 0.37.

The total demand of iron is 0.99 million metric tons and current capacity is 0.76 with installed capacity 1.13. Demand of cement is 7.26 million metric ton with installed capacity 6.97 and current capacity 4.20.

The demand of stone is 21.91 million metric tons and supply is 15.66 million metric tons. The demand of sand is 6.43 million metric tons and supply is 2.28 million metric tons. Similarly, aggregate demand is 2.43 million metric tons and supply is 0.58 million metric tons. The demand of wood is 4.46 metric tons and supply is 2.56 metric tons.

"Nepal has vast quantities of river boulders and pebbles and sand are mined as construction materials. These are adequate inside the country. I don't think there is any reason for the short supply," said professor Dr. Ranjan Kumar Dahal, Engineering Geologist and Geotechnical Engineer.

With the growing demands of iron, cement, CGI and wood, there will be increase in imports. According to Department of Customs, in the last two months, Nepal imported iron worth of 18.19

billion rupees in the last two months against import of the worth of iron 16.5 billion rupees same period last year. In the year 2015, Nepal imported 11.73 billion rupees worth of iron in the two months.

The imports of the products like coal, cement, iron ore, zinc and other raw materials have increased.

According to the Department of Customs, the imports of steel and iron ore jumped from Rs.70 billion to 93 billion in the past one year. Nepal imported 93.715 billion rupees in the fiscal year 2016.017. Imports will likely double the next year given the last two months of the data. Nepal imported woods worth Rs. 4 billion in the same period.

Nepal imported iron and steel worth of 68.933 billion rupees in 2015/016 and iron and articles of iron and steel worth of 9.119 billion rupees. Nepal imported the wood merely 2.574 billion rupees in the year

According to Nepal Foreign Trade Statistics for Fiscal year 2016/017, Nepal imported Rs.9.973 billion worth of iron or steel articles. Similarly, the cement and raw materials for cement industries continues to increase. Similarly, the import of zinc also increased.

"The import of iron, wood and iron related products and other items used in construction has drastically increased," said Shova Kanta Paudyal, Deputy Director General of Department of Custom.

#### **What Went Wrong Then**

The government blames crusher industries for having created a market scarcity of local products and industrialists for the short supply of iron and cement. Crusher industries see the government's frequent interventions and rampant shutdown of the industries by local administrations as responsible for the present crisis.

"Despite the increase in the import, we are facing difficulty to meet the demand of the market," said Kiran Sakha, senior vice president of Nepal Rolling Mill Association. "All 16 rolling mills are operating in their full capacity. As our industry depends on the imported products from third countries, the fluctuation of prices depends upon the dollar strength and the international market price."

As most of the crusher owners





Crusher Plant

are either MPs, local political leaders or local industrialists, there is a big nexus of politicians, administrators and the market players. A field observation shows that this nexus is responsible in creating the scarcity of the locally available construction materials.

With the lack of coordination among the ministries responsible to regulate the crusher industry, the country is facing an unnatural shortage of sand, boulders and stones.

The Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development, the Ministry of Industries and the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation are responsible for checking the exploitation of natural resources from rivers, forests and national parks. However, the Ministry of Environment is responsible to devise measures and guidelines to strike a balance between developmental work and environment.

At present, some 700 crusher plants are estimated to be processing construction materials throughout the country.

All these three ministries have their own interests. Forest Ministry officials accuse the DDCs of aiding contractors in mining natural resources without considering the

environmental impact as their only concern is revenue from the sand and boulders. For the local level, levies on the trade in the construction materials have been an important source of income.

Crusher Industry Entrepreneurs' Association has its own argument. In recent months, more than two dozen crusher industries along the BP Highway and Prthivi Highway in Dhading and Lele of Lalitpur were shut.

"Nepal Reconstruction Authority (NRA) has already requested Ministry of Home Affairs to direct local administration to monitor the market. We are also proposing to hold a meeting with different government ministries, industrialists, including cement industries, as well as iron and steel. NRA has already requested Ministry of Home Affairs to facilitate the supply of local construction materials," said Yam Lal Bhoosal, spokesperson of NRA.



Yam Lal Bhoosal

# "There Is A Shortage Of Materials"

As earthquake reconstruction is going on, SAGARACHARYA, the Unit Head of District Coordination Unit of Dolakha, spoke to NEW SPOTLIGHT on various issues. Excerpts:

## What is the state of reconstruction in Dolakha?

The reconstruction is picking up in Dolakha district. I am expanding the settlement in Dolakha. I have been talking with donor agencies, including NGOs and INGOs. Just a few days ago, I talked with Christian Aid to build a model settlement in Alam Pur and Chikha village of Bigu Village Municipality. Christian Aid has agreed to work in these two villages. We have also resettled the displaced from Bosimpa Village. We have decided to resettle them in Panipokhari. We are in the process of redistribution of landowner certificates. Apart from providing masons, we also provide electricians, plumbers and carpenters.

## How do you see the level of coordination?

We have been working in coordination with all the district level institutions, including the



According to National Reconstruction Housing Guidelines, the Chief District Officer is responsible to coordinate with various local agencies to maintain the supply and prices of construction materials.

In reality, the CDOs rarely summon such meetings. Following the elections of local levels, there is a greater anarchy as some have even imposed additional taxes on the aggregate, sands and bricks. Some local bodies have shut down the stone quarries and industries.

"We have to pay additional money from the top to bottom. We need to pay money for the top level authorities for license, for the local villagers, the district administration and the local police. How can you expect cheaper goods?" said a crusher entrepreneur on condition of anonymity. "Everyone is receiving benefit from our business."

In Gorkha, Dhading and Nuwakot, each Municipality and Village Municipality levies Rs.500 on each truck. If a truck passes three Village

Municipalities, it has to pay additional Rs.1500 Besides that there is also the cost paid to various state units.

"You cannot blame the industries. It is the district administrations and police responsible for the present state," said Ram Prasad Bidari, president of Dhading District Crusher Operators Association.

Out of 27 crusher factories of Dhading district, only half of them are operating now, producing sand and aggregates to various sales depots in Kathmandu, Dhading and other areas.

"The scarcity is not created by us but the government has to take full responsibility," said Purushottam Regmi, general secretary of the Federation of Nepalese Crusher and Mines Entrepreneurs' Association. He claimed that the policy of government and local level elected representative is responsible for present crisis.

"As Ministry of Population and Environment is yet to announce new guidelines, all the crusher industries are legally operational under an order

of July 2015," said Purushottam Nepal, under secretary and head of legal section of Ministry. "There are huge piles of stocks of sands, aggregate, stones."

## Demands of Material

As per the Post Disaster Need Assessment (PDNA), the government is allocating Rs. 667 billion for reconstruction. It means there is a huge need of materials.

According to NRA, there is the need to reconstruct 750 heritage sites, 8680 school buildings, 1197 health posts and 484 damaged government office.

Since there is a massive reconstruction of irrigation, government offices, public houses, private houses, road, bridges under way, there is a huge demand of construction materials and equipment. The government neither has a specific fiscal policy and trade policy in all this.

"The present crisis is related to corruption and accountability," said Padmini Pradhananga, General Secretary at the Transparency

newly-elected representatives of the villages and municipalities. We have been holding meetings of the District Coordination unit regularly. We are settling all the problems faced by the people at local level. MOFAL are responsible to provide the money.

**What is the state of reconstruction materials?**

Frankly speaking, there is a shortage of materials, particularly the locally available materials like stone, wood, sand and aggregate. There are only two stone quarries, which are supplying materials for local construction. However, these two are unable to supply the materials at the present phase. We have already identified other seven quarries and the District Coordination Committee has agreed to open the tender. Tamakoshi River is the main source of sand and aggregate. However, the stone is available here and there. There are only two crushers run by private sector.

**What about other materials?**

We don't have major problems for other materials, including brick, cement and iron. However, the prices have gone up particularly in iron and cement. We held a meeting with the district level unit of Federation of Chamber and Commerce and Industry about the price escalation. They said the price has increased not at local level.

Last year, we were able to build 15,000 houses. This

year we are expecting to complete 25000 to 30000 houses. If materials are available, we will meet the target. Last year there were 2000 masons. Now, we have 4000 trained mason. We need at least 8500 masons. More than 13000 have already secured second installments.

**How do you see the role of INGOs and NGOs?**

I don't know about other districts. However, Karyitas Nepal, a local NGO, is building about 1094 houses in two wards of Bigu Village Municipality. It has already completed sixty percent of the work. They will hand over all the houses by 2019. Similarly, Save the Children is in four wards of Chapra Village Municipality. They are building five hundred houses. Save the Children has already completed 400 houses. The Lutheran World Federation is building 350 houses in one ward of Jiri Municipality and one ward Gaurishanker Rural Municipality. The federation has already completed 315 houses. What I have to say is that NGOs and INGOs have been doing a very good work in Dolakha district.

**What is the policy of NRA?**

If they want to build more houses, we are ready to provide them the villages. We want work in covering a full ward of a particular village.

International. "Whatever the government says, very few houses have been reconstructed and there has been a shortage of labor and engineers and materials to carry out the reconstruction work."

As Nepal is spending over 667 billion rupees for reconstruction, it will have a greater fiscal impact at national level and local level as well. The government has allocated 135 billion rupees in budget for the earthquake reconstruction in the current fiscal year against 63 billion in the previous years.

"The government resource allocation for reconstruction has increased phenomenally in the past two years but the rate of expenditure is poor," said Kishor Maharjan, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Management, and Tribhuvan University. "The current state of expenditure will have significant impacts on fiscal policy and Nepal's foreign trade."

According to Asian Development Bank's economic report, acceleration of post-earthquake reconstruction and other construction activities are some of the key factors leading to

improved output of industrial sector.

However, the question remains as to who will control the uncontrolled



Murari Niraula, Member Secretary, Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) Secretariat under Ministry of Finance, said increased demands of construction materials indicate that the reconstruction is accelerating.

price rise and unjustified scarcity of the construction materials.

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# Recovery And Reconstruction: A Look At The Reconstruction Expenditure

The massive destruction brought about by the earthquake of 2015 called for reconstruction of an equal magnitude. Aids and grants poured in from all over the world to support the reconstruction project. Almost two and a half years after the earthquake it is necessary to review the reconstruction process and its pace from the perspective of the funds being deployed and their utilization at the macro and micro level.

The painful memories of the devastating earthquakes of 2015 are still afresh in the minds of those who went through the experience, more so of those who suffered losses of life and property. As a least developed country with a GDP of about US\$ 21 billion, Nepal did not have sufficient domestic resources to undertake the required reconstruction activities. In just a few months after the two tremors shook Nepal to its core, an international conference was organized to call on the international community to support Nepal in its post-disaster reconstruction efforts. The international community expressed its solidarity towards Nepal's recovery by pledging US\$ 4.1 billion in aid, which was 60 percent of the initially identified recovery need of US\$ 6.7 billion.

With the support of the international donor community the Nepal government embarked upon an arduous journey of recovery and reconstruction. The on-budget pledged aid would add to the government's own budget earmarked for reconstruction purpose. Over the past two years the post-disaster reconstruction and recovery has been a priority of the Nepal government, which has allocated budget for the activities based on the projection provided by the Post Disaster Reconstruction Framework (PDRF) for a period of five years. Unfortunately, the reconstruction expenditure also followed the dismal track pursued by government expenditures in most development programs. An overview and back-of-the-envelope calculations of the allocated budget for reconstruction and its utilization in the previous two fiscal years show a less than 50 percent utilization of the allocated budget by the National Reconstruction Authority. This rather low utilization of the annual budget adds to the public perception of slow pace of reconstruction and recovery. Most importantly, snail-paced expenditure has compelled the thousands of earthquake survivors to brave two harsh winters and monsoons sheltered under plastic tarps.

Having said this, it would be unfair not to look into the trends of budget allocation and utilization over the two fiscal years for the overall budget of the NRA and the individual headings in the budget line pertaining to reconstruction. The general trend is that the allocation of budget under the individual headings has increased. The utilization of the allocated budget also shows an increasing trend, more so under the heading for individual/institutional grants. This increase indicates that the NRA and other implementing agencies have been mobilizing their budget better compared to the preceding year, which has translated into an increase in the number of private houses, schools, classrooms, health centers, heritage sites, roads etc. completed or under construction. The slow pace of fund flow in the first year of the NRA could be attributed to the initial institutional hiccups faced by the NRA that took months to get the NRA Act ratified. The subsequent change in the leadership also played some part. But the fact remains that even after two years a large portion of budget still remains unutilized, which leads to an inference that the reconstruction process has yet to catch the pace it needs. The valuable resources that should be mobilized to



BY PRAGATI KOIRALA

build back better and to build resilient communities remain frozen in the metaphorical vault collecting dust while a large proportion of survivors remain homeless, and communities are left without schools and health care facilities.

There have been comparison between the performance of NGOs/INGOs and the National Reconstruction Authority which does not do much to improve the NRA's public image. This of course is an insufficient condition to judge the NRA's performance as there lies a significant difference between the scale of operation of NGOs/INGOs and the NRA. The cumbersome process that demands coordination between multiple ministries and departments and navigating layers of bureaucratic red tape has

definitely been responsible for delayed fund release. The NRA was set up to streamline the activities required to make reconstruction swifter but anecdotes and expenditure statistics show that the NRA has not succeeded in doing so. What the NRA should be judged on are issues like (but not limited to) how well it identifies recurring obstacles and how (fast) it overcomes those obstacles in order to complete its mandate as well as the knowledge base it creates and the precedent it set for future disaster management and recovery.

One way to identify the causes of delay and devise solutions to fast track the reconstruction could be to understand why there exists an immense gap between the number of first tranche receivers, second tranche receivers and third tranche receivers. The number of houses completed and under construction stands at only 30 percent of the households that received the first tranche. Therefore, it has become necessary to track the grant amount to determine how it was utilized by the recipients. It could provide an insight into why the beneficiaries have not started building their houses as well as if they intend to rebuild in the near future. This kind of analysis and tracking could also help the NRA and other implementing agencies to identify the necessary policy changes in order to make the reconstruction process more efficient and effective. Another positive outcome of this kind of tracking could be the identification of any kind of fraudulent activities that could have occurred during the distribution of the first tranche so as to minimize those activities during the distribution of the subsequent tranches.

Surveys conducted in some of the affected district show that the beneficiaries have used the cash grants for livelihood purposes, paying off debt, retrofitting their damaged houses etc. This varied use of the cash grant has been due to reasons like the insufficiency of the cash grants to build their houses, inflated cost of raw materials, lack of technical and skilled manpower, high transportation cost of raw materials etc. The reasons for the slow pace of reconstruction are numerous but the outcome is that a large percentage of survivors are still living the unimaginable hardship brought about by the earthquakes more than two years ago. There is no doubt that more efforts could be and should be made by the responsible agencies to reduce and ultimately eliminate the sufferings of those survivors, sooner rather than later.

*Pragati Koirala is a Research Associate of South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE). ■*

# Notes On Nepalese Coins

The Shakya kingdom which existed in around 500 BCE is said to be the first kingdom of Nepal which minted coins. It is suggested that silver punch mark coin that were discovered in Nepal subsequently must have been imported from the Maurya Empire in the sub-continent. The coins of the Kushan Empire, formed by Yuezhi, in the Bactrian territories in the early 1st century CE, were said to be rarely used in hills and Kathmandu valley region.

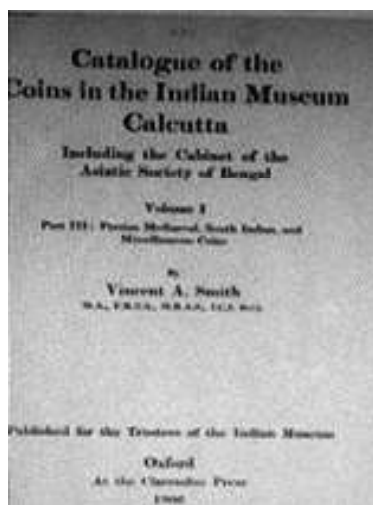
Vincent A. Smith's *Catalogue of the Coins in the Indian Museum Calcutta Including the Cabinet of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Volume I (Part III: Persian Mediaeval, South Indian, and Miscellaneous Coins)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906) includes references on coinage in classical period of Nepal. Smith points out that Nepal was part of the Ashoka Empire. Ashoka died in c. 232 BCE. In the fourth century AD Nepal was no longer under the control of Samundra Gupta (330 to 380 CE), the son of King Chandragupta. Smith claims that about 637 AD King Harsha Vardhana took Nepal under its control again. But by the time of his death Nepal had become a dependency of Tibet.

According to Vincent Smith, an Irish born Indologist, Nepal's numismatic history begins in the sixth century. During this time, the Lichchavis used to rule Nepal. The Lichchavi Kingdom existed in the Kathmandu Valley from approximately 400 to 750 CE. A series of large copper coins bearing the names of Mananka, Gunanka, Vaisravana, Amsuvarman, Jishnugupta, and Pashupati were used during the sixth century. Amsuvarman ruled Nepal between 640 and 650. He was succeeded by Jishnugupta. Their rules have been evidenced by inscriptions of their period. The testimony of the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang also proves that Amsuvarman was reigning at that time, and that he was succeeded by Jishnugupta. Smith notes that "the dates of the coins inscribed with the names of Mananka, Gunanka, Vaisravana, and Pashupati cannot be determined with equal precision, but those of Mananka may be assigned to the sixth, and the latest, those of Pashupati, to the eighth century. Vaisravana and Pashupati probably are the names of deities, not of kings."



BY DR. BIPIN ADHIKARI

King Raghava Deva, a Thakuri king, founded a ruling dynasty in Nepal in 879 CE when the Lichchavi rule came to an end. He also introduced a new era, the Nepal Samvat or Newar Samvat, the first year of which began on October 20, 879 A.D. Relying on M. Levi, Smith mentions that the establishment of the Nepal Samvat was the official declaration of the independence of Nepal, "which then severed its political dependence on Ti-



bet." There are no additional references in this regard.

New coins are found in Nepal again at the beginning of the seventeenth century after a long gap. By this time, the country was already divided into the three principalities of Bhadgaun, Kathmandu and Patan. Smith finds that the first recorded coin date to be 751 Nepal Samvat i. e. 1631 AD. This coin was minted by King Siddhi Narasimha Malla of Patan. There is also a mention of an undated coin of King Lakshmi

Narasimha Malla of Kathmandu. He reigned from 1595 to 1639 A. D. Referring to a chronicle, it is stated that the first silver coinage of Nepal was struck in the sixteenth century. It was done by King Mahindra Malla of Kathmandu. It is stated that he visited Delhi to obtain special permission from the Emperor, presumably Akbar, to mint new coins. Smith clarifies: "the coins of the Malla Rajas of the three principalities are dated, if dated at all, in the Nepali or Newar era, and the series extends up to the Gorkhali conquest in 1768 AD." The new dynasty continued minting new coins, but dated them in the Saka era, rather than the era established by King Raghava Deva.

On the technical side, Vincent Smith has a clear general impression: "The ancient copper coinage of Amsuvarman, is closely allied to the Yaudheya coinage, and, like it, is descended from the Kushan. The heaviest of the specimens catalogued weighs 208-4 grains, and may have been intended for a 1.5 pana piece of about 219 grains. The Malla coinage, in silver only, seems to have been struck to the Delhi rupee standard of 175 grains. Some specimens exhibit imperfect attempts to copy the Persian or Arabic legends of the Mughal coinage. All the known coins are broad thin pieces about an inch in diameter, generally weighing about 85 grains. The heaviest recorded weight for these half-rupees is 87-5 grains for coins of Siddhi Narsimha of Patan and Ranajita Malla of Bhatgaon. The types, excepting a few pieces which attempt to copy the Mughal coinage, are local in character."

Distinguishing between Malla coins and Gorkhali coins, it is pointed out that the Gorkhali coinage bears a general resemblance to that of the Malla Rajas. The Gorkhali coinage is struck to the same standard. The difference is that it includes "examples of whole rupees, as well as of fractions smaller than the half." King Girvan Yuddha Vikram and Surendra Vikrama issued gold coins during their rule. These coins were similar to the silver in weight and design. King Surendra also emitted an extensive copper coinage.

Smith has a bold conclusion: "the Nepalese prefer the so-called 'dumpy piece,' rough lumps of copper manufactured by private persons, which are largely used to this day, not only in Nepal, but in the adjoining British districts." ■

TONI HAGEN

# Centenary Celebration

*Toni Hagen's Rare Photographs Of Nepal shows how his contribution helped expose Nepal to the globe*

By A CORRESPONDENT

Although he was born in Switzerland, Europe, Toni Hagen spent his entire life working and promoting Nepal. Late Hagen contributed to all sectors of Nepal. His contribution exposed Nepal to the globe.

Not only this, he also suggested a model of development to Nepal. Unlike the western model of big industries and highways, what he proposed was having small industries and small power projects as well as ropeways for Nepal's transport system.

As Nepal's road transport has been creating a lot of landslides and natural disasters, Hagen's five decades old vision of a ropeway for transportation has proved more environmental friendly.

When he first visited Nepal in 1950 as a part of Technical Assistance Team sent by the Swiss Government to help with the tentative steps at government at introducing western style development, Nepal was under the Rana rule and isolated from the rest of the world.

However, late Hagen fell in love with the nature of Nepal. He was the first foreigner to complete trekking all parts of Nepal. "As the geologist in the Swiss Team, Hagen was allowed to go around the countryside, an experience that whittled his desire to see more of this unknown land. This is where he began a relationship with a country that grew into a close friendship over half a century," said Dr. P.K. Jha, president of Toni Hagen Foundation.

Toni Hagen Foundation, in celebrating the birth centenary of

late Toni Hagen, organised a program in which various speakers highlighted the role played by Hagen in Nepal's development.

Collecting a large number of photographs of Nepal in the various

was known as Shangri-La.

Supported by Nepal Investment Bank and Dwarika Group of Hotels and Resorts, the event displayed photographs provided by Dr. Katryn Hagen, the daughter of Toni Hagen.



stages and publishing a number of books, Hagen contributed a lot to understand Nepal's diverse geography. One could see that at a photo exhibition organized in Kathmandu on the occasion.

Swiss Ambassador Jorg Frieden and Katryn Hagen and daughter of Swiss geologist Toni Hagen inaugurated the photo exhibition of Toni Hagen, showcasing the pictures taken 60 years ago.

Organized by Nepal Heritage Society, on the occasion of the 38th World Tourism Day and World Heritage Day, the Exhibition of Rare Photographs of 1950s of Nepal taken by Dr. Toni Hagen was the first of its kind with all rare photographs of Nepal.

Displayed at the gallery of Nepal Art Council, the photographs are the testimony to show why Nepal

Speaking at the inaugural program, Swiss Ambassador to Nepal Jorg Frieden highlighted the role played by Hagen in Nepal's overall development. Director General of Department of Archeology Bhesh Narayan Dahal said that Toni Hagen's contribution to Nepal will be remembered forever.

The Director General of the Department of Tourism spoke about the importance of the photographs in promoting tourism. President of Nepal Heritage Society Ambika Shrestha said that this is a great occasion to promote Nepal's heritage through the photographs taken by Hagen. "The photographs displayed at the exhibition are a reminder of Nepal's past. We are very thankful to Dr. Katryn Hagen, daughter of Toni Hagen, who has provided the photos." ■

# Manufacturing Idiots

Albert Einstein once said, "Only two things are infinite, the universe and human stupidity, and I'm not sure about the universe!" Do you know that a number of elected political leaders are running legal issues in Parliament? Do you expect that the legal proceedings against them will allow the law to run properly in the country?

Whoever does not know how to govern himself cannot govern the people. Current politicians do not know how to govern themselves; they are full of cunning, selfishness, hatred, greed, lust, jealousy, envy, gluttony, and, even drunkenness, in some cases. I do not think the person who has not completed his school education will be able to develop your state and country.

Why are politicians corrupt, inefficient, and liars? The short answer is simple. It is because they are allowed to be. Because it is free. There is nothing to control them. There are no restrictions on their actions nor can there ever be because they have the power. The greatest incentive for crime is politics, especially with an omnipotent government. Today political parties crave for power to satisfy their particular personal interests, not for the general interest.

Almost all political parties in Nepal are run by pseudo intellectuals. Someone said this well: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Political and social ethics for a political party is diverging towards an unknown direction? Cheats, thieves, illiterates, passport sellers, mate poachers and alcoholics are found to have ensconced themselves in the political scene as the leaders of the Nepali political spectrum.

These political parties are run by people with an illusory superiority complex. They are incompetent individuals who tend to overestimate their own ability.

These people are unable to recognize the ability of others. A good organization should be S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely). Few of them have any of those attributes. Honest and hardworking people like you and me have no stake in the political map. Adapt or perish are the only two choices left for people like you and me.

These politicians are trying to play a game that they do not quite know and they have never mastered it, nor will they learn it. The paradigm is such that we have no right choice. Just a bunch of thieves who set us up against each other. There is hardly any profession that would have a worse social judgment than our politicians. Their name is tied up with incompetence, corruption, and lying, but still, a lot of people vote for them.

Since the first barter of a drachma by a vote in Athens more than 2500 years ago, politicians have practiced the well-perfected but rudimentary art of buying votes. Today, its incentives range from alcohol, cash, food, and clothing in exchange of votes.

As time goes by, buying votes can become a difficult phenomenon to eradicate. Citizens, especially the poorest and the most marginalized, may come to believe that paying cash before the elections are the only things they get from an ineffective government. They may come to depend on it. The result is a vicious circle. Purchase of votes takes place where political parties fail to build a brand that convinces voters that they can trust their electoral promises. Lack of loyalty to the party itself meant that political parties had virtually no significance in terms of ideology or long-term commitments.

The less intelligent people are often very confident. The most



BY DEEPAK RAJ JOSHI

intelligent people, on the other hand, are not at all. This is the reason why we choose idiots because they are the ones that we most resemble. We choose idiots because we understand them when they speak. We choose idiots because they are the guarantees that there will not be big changes because they are incapable of generating them. No one believes to be an idiot and not everyone is. Maybe our way of relating makes us idiots.

Bottom line one is we choose idiots because we're idiots. Otherwise, why do we continue to vote for people whose intellectual ability often raises serious doubts? Why would someone choose an imbecile to make decisions for us? The answer is much less simple than it may seem. An intelligent candidate is forced to pretend to be stupid to succeed in the political arena.

Do not get me wrong, all politicians are not idiots, but many of them are and those good ones are hard to find and no one listens to them.

Our society manufactures idiots. In a democracy, we are all politicians and the worst thing about politicians is that they are very similar to those whom you have chosen. Every fool always finds another bigger fool to praise him. But that's not all! After a while, they begin to brag about each other.

Why does honesty not pay in politics? Let everyone draw their own conclusion according to their own cognitive bias. What is happening in Nepal is nothing more than a consequence of years of bad political practice.

Bottom line two is idiots want the idiots to rule them in their world of corruption and where they are free to shout out crap, stupidities or complexes of race, class or gender and that is why they choose stupid politicians to represent them.

In politics, unlike in business, the price (value) of a vote is not fixed by the parties (companies), but by the voters (consumers). The votes are the currency we use to "buy" the candidates (products) that meet our expectations.

Based on the EC reports there are 14,054,482 voters for our local election and Ministry of Finance (MoF) allocated Rs. 20 billion in total budget for the local level election. So far 73

% of 14,054,482 cast their vote. if we do the math 1 vote cost approximately RS 1949.36. This is just an economic cost. What about long term social and political costs? For a country with brutal inequality, corruption, repression and inefficiency, there is a need of a greater debate about the price of democracy. Democracy is getting expensive for us.

I do not believe in fate, but there are certain moments in life that almost convince me to believe that nothing is by chance. We continue to suffer this form of politics, always based on silly schools of thoughts -- whoever runs the show, all they do is follow political monism. Monism leads to extremism and it is often the consequence of fundamentalism. Conspiracy is not new to political landscape in Nepal. Political parties in Nepal have the tradition to get rid of good people or create an environment where good people never get to where they should be or will not survive. Sad but true, so far they are successful. So the million-dollar question is, did you vote for those who think you are an idiot? If you did then you might be proving they are right by voting for them. As long as these politicians keep being elected for office, we will be practicing democracy in its worst form, which is stupidocracy.

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

*Why does honesty not pay in politics? Let everyone draw their own conclusion according to their own cognitive bias. What is happening in Nepal is nothing more than a consequence of years of bad political practice.*



## SHANKER HOTEL

# A Palace Preserved

*If there is a will, there is a way. This is what the owner of Hotel Shanker has shown*

By A CORRESPONDENT

At a time when the government and owners of many old Rana palaces are dismantling the neo-classic buildings, the owners of Agni Bhawan, a portion of greater Lazimpat Palace, have shown the courage to preserve the past.

Following the earthquake of 2015, Nepal's Central Bank dismantled two historical palaces, Singh Mahal and Lalita Niwas, Nepal Army dismantled Laxmi Niwas, Ministry of General Administration dismantled Hariharbhawan, President's office is destroying Shital Niwas, but the owners of Hotel Shanker or Agni Bhawan have taken a step forward to renovate it. The lonely battle of Chanda Rana, a conservationist, saved the Shita Bhawan.

With a strong commitment in preservation and personal attachment to the old neo classic Rana palaces, the owners of Shanker Hotel restored the Agni Bhawan or Lazimpat Palace in the old shape. The hotel is planning to open it completely in November.

"I am happy to share with you that we are able to renovate the front face of this hotel in its older shape," said Prabhu Shanker Shrestha, Executive Manager of Hotel Shanker. "We have personal attachment towards the building, which inspires us to preserve it. Due to our regular maintenance, damage occurred only in the front face. We were able to operate the hotel in less than a month of the quake," said Shrestha.

After the grand opening of the front portion of the Hotel, Agni Bhawan will be revived again. However, a portion of Lazimpat Palace, next to the Bhawan which is owned by Department of Internal Revenue, is fast degrading.

"It was the royal residence of the rulers of Nepal from 1894 until 1964, when it was converted into a luxury hotel. The facade was kept intact but the

interiors were redesigned to give travelers the kind of comfort they'd expect of a world class hotel. The hotel is characterized by exquisite and authentic objects d'art. For example, the carved windows displayed in the lobby bar are over 200 years old," claims the hotel online site.



Prabhu Shanker Shrestha

According to Wikipedia, Ram Shanker Shrestha converted it into the country's premier heritage hotel-Hotel Shanker-by keeping its unique identity intact even while ensuring most modern amenities to its guests.

As other palaces, the ownership of Lazimpat Palace also changed time to time. At the turn of the 19th century, Gen. Jit Shumsher Rana, brother of Tin Maharaja Bhim Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana, hired architect Kumar Narsingh Rana to build the most elegant palace in Kathmandu. Gilt mirrors, velvet, marble and sunburst chandeliers were imported from Europe; the exteriors were fashioned in neo-classical style. The construction was completed in 1894 A.D.

Gen. Jit Shumsher died in 1913, and this palace eventually came into the possession of Agni Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana - the son of Maharaja Juddha Shumsher Rana.

However, the palace was badly damaged by great earthquake of 1934 and it was rebuilt again. After the great

earthquake of 1934, chief engineer Colonel late Dilli Jung Thapa was given the assignment to reconstruct the destroyed palaces in Kathmandu.

In 1964 A.D., Late Ram Shanker Shrestha bought this palace and converted it into the hotel, commencing operations with 23 rooms. His ingenious concept of maintaining the old age beauty and merging it with modern comfort is the secret behind the continued existence of Hotel Shanker, Kathmandu.

The history of the palace is closely linked with the history of Nepal and its rulers. As Thapathali was the residence of the Thapas, Lazimpat was the abode of the Pandeys. At the time of the Kot massacre on 14 September 1846, Lazimpat Durbar was occupied by Kaji Bir Keshar Pande and was massacred there. After which Lazimpat Durbar was occupied by Kaji Mama Col. Tribikram Singh Thapa for 28 years until he left for Varanasi in 1875.

In 1886 old Lazimpat Durbar was demolished and a new palace was erected by the then Prime Minister Bir Shumsher JBR for his brother General Jit Shumsher. As General Jit Shumsher had no one to inherit his property, after his death in 1913 his palace was captured by Juddha Shumsher JBR and he gave it to his son Agni Shumsher JBR.

Furnished with the finest accessories imported from Europe, Agni Bhawan was one of the most elegant of all durbars in Kathmandu. In due time, it became the property of General Agni Shumsher Rana, son of Juddha Shumsher JB Rana, and grandfather of the late Queen Aishwarya, former Queen Komal, and the late Princess Prekshya, who were all born here.

With the hand of heritage lover family of Ram Shanker Shrestha, Agni Bhawan has been renovated and it has survived even after the earthquakes of 2015. ■





# Korea, Nepal Share Warm Relations

BY YOUNGSIK PARK

Since I arrived in April to assume the ambassadorial position, this is the first auspicious national day celebration in Nepal. Thus, I take this day as a very important national day program for me. Following the reception, we are hosting a special Korean musical program. This music concert will bring Korean modern and traditional music in one place.

Although Nepal and Korea are geographically far away, the relationship between people of Korea and Nepal is very close. Known as a roof the world with Himalayas and birthplace of Shakyamuni, large numbers of Koreans have been visiting Nepal. Since honorable President of Republic of Korea Moon Jae-in visited twice to Nepal, my understanding is that honorable president also had a deeply cordial feeling towards Nepal. During his last visit, he involved himself in the reconstruction program in earthquake affected areas showing solidarity with Nepalese who were in a difficult situation and walk together with the Nepali people.

Korea and Nepal established diplomatic relations in 1974. Since the establishment of the diplomatic relations, our bilateral relations have further developed

relations at the people to people level. The existing friendly relations between the two countries are not limited to economic exchange only. Nepal is one of the priority countries for Korea's ODA. To share our development experiences, we have been launching various programs in education, agriculture and health, giving them priority.



Republic of Korea is hosting the winter Olympics with a slogan of Passion connected in Korean city Pyeongchang the 2018 February. I hope that this Olympic will bring peace not only in Korean Peninsula but also in the world. I hope that many Nepalis will come to see the Pyeongchang Olympic since it is going to be most secure Olympic than others. I am confident that Korea Nepal friendly relations will further strengthen in the coming days. I wish for further development and prosperity of Korea Nepal relations.

*(Youngsik Park is the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Nepal. Excerpts of the statement delivered at Korean National Day reception.)* ■

and strengthened. I would like to inform you that as per the economic capability, Korea has been offering its support to Nepal's hydropower development. Instead of mobile phone, car and electric and electronic products, our business group will involve it more on hydropower and tourism, which will be foundation for future economic development.

As a foundation of people to people relations, the employment permits system has improved day by day. Nepalese working in Korea are sending positive messages proving themselves as hardworking compared to workers from other parts of the world. These Nepali workers have major contributions in the economic development of both the countries. Nepalese workers, who returned from Korea, have been playing a very important role to strengthen the



# An Action To End Child Marriage In Nepal

At a time when human trafficking, drugs abuse, sexual harassment against continue to increase, Nepal Police Launches a new Program Police In The Cicinity Parvati no longer believes that one's fate cannot be changed.

22-year-old Parvati has been advocating to end child marriage in her village in Udayapur for several years. She barely escaped child marriage herself. When she was 17, a proposal was made for the sister immediately above her but when the girl said that she wanted to continue studying, Parvati was offered instead. Parvati refused, but the lami (match-maker) did not give up and the boy's family had made up their mind not to go back without a daughter-in-law. Being a member of a child club in her village in the past, she had attended orientations where she had learnt that child marriage is illegal and that boys and girls are not mature enough to get married before 20. It was not easy to convince her parents and the family of the boy, but she was determined and sought the support of the local Village Child Protection and Promotion Committee. Finally, others had to give way.

Since then, she has decided to do whatever she can so



BY BARUN BAJRACHARYA AND NISSI THAPA

marriage is imprisonment for up to three years and a fine of up to 10,000 rupees (\$100) but the implementation of these legal provisions is very feeble.

One of the causes as well consequences of child marriage is poverty. Food insecurity also plays a crucial role. It is a common practice in poor families to marry their daughters at a young age to

decrease the financial burden and reduce the number of mouths to feed. The fear of dowry, which is another common and harmful practice and increases with the age of the girl, force parents to marry their daughters off at a young age especially in the Terai region.

Nonetheless, there has been some progress in Nepal over the years with the government's commitment to ending child marriage. The Government of Nepal endorsed Nepal's first National Strategy to End Child Marriage in 2006 and a national implementation plan for the same is being developed.

To give momentum to this progress and with a goal to reduce child marriage in Nepal, World Vision International Nepal has joined hands with the National Youth Council and Association of Community Radio Broadcasters Nepal to run a five-year nation-wide campaign from 2017-2021. The campaign titled "It takes Nepal to end child marriage" was launched by Right Honourable President Bidya Devi Bhandari and attended by high-level dignitaries and children on 10 August 2017.

This campaign will further support the government's initiatives to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially targeting SDGs 5.3 and 16.2. The focus will be on empowering children and working closely with government, civil society, private sectors and communities to bring an end to child marriage in Nepal.

Parvati may be young but that doesn't stop her from envisioning a community that is child marriage-free. "Child marriage, initiated by parents and relatives, has reduced substantially here in Udayapur due to the increased awareness activities by various organisations. The major challenge now is underage boys and girls choosing to elope after falling in love," she shares.

*(The authors work at World Vision International Nepal) ■*



Parvati

that no one else should have to go through what she had to go through.

UNICEF's The State of the World's Children report has ranked Nepal among the top ten countries for child marriage. Nepal ranks third, after India and Bangladesh, in South Asia, according to that report.

Nepal's Country Code states that punishment for child

# A Good Conversation

My dad always says, it's important to communicate with people, and it even more important to be a good listener.

Can you improve your conversation skills? Certainly. It might take a while to change the conversation habits that's been ingrained throughout your life, but it is possible.

Here are some common mistakes many of us have made in conversations and a couple of solutions to help improve your social skills.

## Not listening

Ernest Hemingway said: "I like to listen. I have learned a great deal from listening carefully. Most people never listen." Don't be like most people. Don't just wait eagerly for your turn to talk. Learn to really listen to what people are saying. When you start to listen, you'll pick up on loads of potential paths in the conversation. But avoid yes or no type of questions as they will not give you much information. When you ask the right question, the person will delve deeper into the subject giving you more information to work with and more paths for you to choose from. And as they start to open up, the conversation becomes more interesting.

## Asking too many questions

If you ask too many questions the conversation can feel like a bit of an interrogation. Or like you don't have that much to contribute. One alternative is to mix questions with statements and then the conversation can flow on from there and it can help you to have good discussions.

## Tightening up

When in conversation with someone you just meet or when the usual few topics are exhausted an awkward silence or mood might appear. Or you might just become nervous. If you're running out of things to say, you can always start talking about the current news, or like what happened on the latest episode of Game of Thrones. Comment on the aquarium at the party, or the host's playlist. You can always start new conversations about something in your surroundings.

If you feel nervous or weird when meeting someone for the first time assume rapport. What that means is that you imagine how you feel when you meet one of your best friends. And pretend that this new acquaintance is one of your best friends. Don't overdo it though, you might not want to hug and kiss right away. But if you imagine this you'll go into a positive emotional state. And you'll start talking to this new person with a relaxed attitude because that's how you talk to your friends. It might sound a bit loopy or too simple, but it really works.

## Poor delivery

One of the most important things in a conversation is not what you say, but how you say it. A change in these habits can make a big difference since your voice and body language is a vital part of communication. Here are some tips:

1. Slowing down: When you get excited about something it's easy to start talking faster and faster. Try and slow down. It will make it much easier for people to listen and for you to actually get what you are saying across to them.
2. Speaking up: Don't be afraid to talk as loud as you need to for people to hear you.
3. Speaking clearly: Don't mumble.
4. Speak with emotions: No one listens for that long if you speak with a monotone voice. Let your feelings be reflected in your voice.
5. Using pauses: Slowing down your talking plus adding a



BY SHRADHA GYAWALI

small pause between thoughts or sentences creates a bit of tension and anticipation. People will start to listen more attentively to what you're saying.

## Hogging the spot-light

Everyone involved in a conversation should get their time in the spotlight. Don't interrupt someone when they are telling their view on what you are discussing to divert the attention back to yourself. Find a balance between listening and talking.

## Having to be right

Avoid arguing and having to be right about every topic. Often a conversation is not really a discussion. It's a more of a way to keep a good mood going. No one will be that impressed if you "win" every conversation. Instead just sit back, relax and help keep the good feelings going.

## Talking about a weird or negative topic

if you're at a party or somewhere where you are just getting to know some people you should avoid some topics. Talking about your bad health or relationships, your crappy job or boss, serial killers, technical lingo that only you and some other guy understands or anything that will suck the positive energy out of the conversation. You might also want to save religion and politics for conversations with your friends.

## Being boring

Always be prepared to drop a subject when you start to bore people, or when everyone is getting bored and the topic is starting to run out of steam. Don't start to whine about your boss or your job; people don't want to hear that. Instead, talk about your last trip somewhere, some funny anecdote that happened while you were buying clothes or something funny or exciting. Knowing a little about many things or at least being open to talk about them instead of trying to steer the conversation back to your favourite subject is a nice quality. Opening up a bit and not clinging desperately to one topic will make the conversation feel more relaxed and open. You will come across like a person who can talk about many things with ease. As you've probably experienced with other people; this quality is something you appreciate in a conversation and makes you feel like you can connect to that person easily.

## Not reciprocating

Open up and say what you think, share how you feel. If someone shares an experience, open up too and share one of your own. Don't just stand there nodding and answer with short sentences. If someone is investing in the conversation they'd like you to invest too. When needed, be the first one to open up and invest in the conversation.

## Not contributing much

You might feel that you don't have much to contribute to a conversation, but try anyway. Listen, and ask questions. Make relating statements. Develop your observational skills to pick up interesting stuff in your surroundings to talk about. Develop your personal knowledge-bank by expanding your view of interesting things in the world. Work on your body language, how you talk and try assuming rapport to improve your communication skills.

But take it easy. Don't do it all at once. You'll just feel confused and overwhelmed. Instead, pick out the three most important things that you feel needs improving. Work on them every day, notice the difference and keep at it. Soon your new habits will start to pop up spontaneously when you are in a conversation. Happy conversing! ■

# Beldangi Refugee Camp

Preeti Rai's eyes shine as she turns on a laptop at a computer learning center in Beldangi Refugee Camp in eastern Nepal.

For the past 11 months, the 14-year old Bhutanese refugee girl has been regularly taking computer classes as part of the school syllabus in Panchayati English School in the camp.

"I had always been curious about using computers but growing up in the camp meant that I never had the chance to use one," said the eighth-grader.

Preeti said she was so excited that she used to visit the school with friends even during holidays just to see the lab being constructed.

Hundreds of refugee students, like Preeti as well as students from the surrounding local communities, are now enjoying computer-based learning thanks to a newly built solar-powered lab funded by the IKEA Foundation through UNHCR.

"In the past, I had to rely just on theory classes and textbooks," said Preeti, as her fingers played with the keyboard. "Now I can touch and work on it. Learning has become so much fun."

The lab, fitted with 48 computers and connected with internet facilities in two rooms, became operational in August 2016. Within months, more than 4,100 students, including 1,320 students from the host community, benefitted from computer education in 2016 alone.

In Nepal, UNHCR has been consistently advocating for



Semanta Bhattarai, computer teacher and supervisor of the lab, representing Caritas Nepal.

the inclusion of refugee children in the national education system to provide sustainable, predictable access to formal education. UNHCR believes the quality education that builds relevant skills and knowledge enables refugees to live healthy, productive lives and builds skills for self-reliance.

"Education is the passport to the future not only for refugee children but for all children," said Anna Pelosi, Head



BY DEEPESH DAS SHRESTHA

of UNHCR Sub-Office Damak. As such, UNHCR is committed to supporting education facilities and the enhancement of ICT facilities to provide students with the tools needed to thrive in an increasingly computerized world.C3.jpg

"The learning center provides opportunities for both refugees and host community children to develop skills that are extremely relevant for living in today's increasingly technological society," said Semanta Bhattarai, computer teacher and supervisor of the lab, representing Caritas Nepal.

Access to the computer lab, the first one of its kind, is expected to strengthen linkages between the two communities and promote peaceful co-existence.

"The host community schools don't have computer labs so many students from the surrounding villages of Beldangi are eager to enroll in the computer classes," said Semanta.

This year, more than 3000 students, including 1200 Nepali children from areas surrounding Beldangi Camp are receiving computer education at the center.

Children from grades 5 to 10, who attend their local schools receive practical classes twice a week on Saturdays and Sundays, while refugee students from grade 3 -10 attend computer classes on weekdays.

Although computer education is being taught in local schools, due to lack of computer facilities, students have no opportunity to put into practice the theoretical knowledge they acquire. The refugee camp-based center has become a hot spot for students, who alongside refugee students practice the fundamentals of communication and computer technology in order to prepare themselves for the technological world in which they are growing up. "Most of the students are using computers for the first time and they are really excited," said the supervisor. "The center has been fully utilized by students," he further said, adding that they were facing challenges to accommodate the high number of local and refugee students wishing to enhance their practical computer skills.

"I was not able to use mouse and keyboard properly but now I have made huge improvements," said 16-year-old Bhutanese refugee, Jit Bahadur Pradhan, who studies in grade 8 in the same school. "For me, the lab has opened a window to the world. It has helped me to visualize things beyond my textbooks." Teachers at the school have also been trained in a range of computer-based education programmes, enabling them to provide a better education to their pupils after the school embraced Information Communication and Technology (ICT) system. They now use interactive tools to teach students as part of their lessons.

"Besides providing quality education, the use of technology is also fostering harmonious relations between the two communities between the refugee and the host community," said the computer teacher.

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## Statement by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly, New York, September 21, 2017

Last December, the UN General Assembly adopted the resolution on "Promotion of a democratic and equitable international order", which clearly stipulated the inadmissibility of interference into internal affairs of sovereign States, non-recognition of coups d'état as a method of change of power and the need to exclude from the international communication the attempts of unlawful pressure of certain States on others, including exterritorial application of national jurisdiction.

The prevailing majority of Member States of this Organization voted in favor of this resolution. The countries that, despite the goals and principles of the UN Charter, are trying to dominate in global affairs and impose models of development, as well as their own 'values' on States and peoples, guided by the logic of unipolarity that undermines the international law, turned out to be outvoted.

Nevertheless, the world keeps changing. It is gratifying to note, as the U.S. president Donald Trump unequivocally stated from this podium last Tuesday, that: it is important to comply with the principles of sovereignty in the international affairs; it is necessary to ensure leadership by example and not impose one's will on other nations; the countries with different values, cultural patterns and aspirations can not only coexist, but also work hand in hand on the basis of mutual respect. I believe that anyone can sign under these words, especially, if the U.S. foreign policy is conducted precisely on this basis.

Sovereignty, refraining from interference into internal affairs, equality of people and mutual respect - Russia has always adhered to these principles and will continue to uphold them. For the last quarter of a century, Russia, no matter the challenges it faced, made in good faith its part of the way to eliminate the legacy of the Cold War, has done a lot to strengthen confidence and mutual understanding in the Euro-Atlantic region and the world. This, however, has not been reciprocated by our Western partners, overexcited by the illusion of the 'end of history' and still trying to accommodate rudimentary institutions of block-to-block confrontation era to the modern day realities. NATO aspires to recreate the Cold War climate and refuses to bring to life the principle of equal and indivisible security across the OSCE area, solemnly declared in the 1990s.

The West structured its policy according to the principle of "who's not with us is against us", having chosen the path of reckless eastward NATO expansion and provoking instability in the post-Soviet space and encouraging anti-Russian sentiments. This policy is precisely the root cause of the protracted conflict in South-Eastern Ukraine. Despite the efforts being undertaken in the Normandy format and the Contact



Group, Kyev invents more and more tricks to bog down the implementation of its obligations on implementing the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015, endorsed by the UN Security Council.

But even under those circumstances Russia is aiming at constructive work and the search for mutually acceptable ways to implement the Minsk agreements. In response to the expressed concerns regarding the current state of affairs in the field of security, President Vladimir Putin launched an initiative to establish the UN Mission for the protection of OSCE observers in Donbass. A relevant draft resolution has been tabled in the UN Security Council. We hope that the Russian proposal will facilitate the settlement of the internal Ukrainian crisis

that broke out as a result of the anti-constitutional coup perpetrated by the ultra-radicals. We are looking forward to constructive interaction on those issues with our European and US partners, without zero-sum games.

Being here, at the UN headquarters, we must not forget about the origins of the United Nations. The rulings of the Nuremberg Tribunal served as a warning against leaving in oblivion the lessons of World War II and the disastrous consequences of the attempts to rule the destinies of the world by trampling lawful interests of other nations and peoples. It is an outrage to use one's concern for freedom of expression as an excuse to condone radical movements that profess neo-Nazi ideology and stand up for heroization of Nazis and their associates. Consistent efforts are required to put a secure shield against neo-Nazism, revanchism, extremism and xenophobia, and enhance international and intercultural harmony.

By instigating hatred and intolerance, terrorists, extremists and nationalists destroy and desecrate the objects of historic, religious and cultural value. Civilized Europe tolerates the demolition of monuments to the liberators of the continent and heroes of WWII whose victory laid the foundation of the United Nations. We deem it necessary to pay without delay a priority attention to this issue at the UN General Assembly and UNESCO in order to provide for corresponding legal framework to prevent of such actions. Russia intends to submit relevant proposals.

It is inadmissible to remain indifferent to either the shameful phenomenon of non-citizenship persisting in Europe, or the suppression of minority languages in violation of the Conventions of the Council of Europe.

Throughout the ages, world history has proved that the lasting settlement of disputes is possible only through dialogue and finding the balance between basic interests of conflicting parties. Unfortunately, blatant pressure, instead of diplomacy, is more and more

## PROMOTIONAL

prevailing in the arsenal of a number of Western countries. The application of unilateral sanctions, above those introduced by the UN Security Council, is illegitimate and undermines the collective nature of international efforts. Today, the world is watching with alarm as the U.S. imposes yet a new set of restrictions against Iran which, on top of all, are extraterritorial in nature and threaten the realization of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action that became one of the key factors of international and regional stability.

The faultiness of unilateral sanctions policy has been long proven by the example of more than half a century of the U.S. blockade of Cuba, the immediate lift of which for decades has been called for by almost all the UN Member States. It's time to listen

to these calls.

The confrontation around the DPRK is unfolding dangerously. We resolutely condemn the nuclear missile adventures of Pyongyang in violation of the UN Security Council resolutions. However, the buildup of military hysteria is not only dead-end but also deadly. It goes without saying that all the UN Security Council resolutions must be implemented. But all of them, along with sanctions, contain provisions on the need to resume talks. We launch an appeal to stop blocking these provisions. There is no alternative to the political and diplomatic methods of addressing the nuclear problem of the Korean Peninsula based on dialogue among all interested parties. We call on responsible members of international community to support the Russia-China roadmap contained in the joint statement of 4 July, made by the Foreign Ministries of Russia and China.

Instigation to turmoil and threats of power interference for the sake of the so-called democratization of Venezuela or actions to undermine the legitimate government of any country are inadmissible. In any internal conflicts the international community must encourage the parties to national reconciliation and compromise.

The attempts to ignore differing opinions, to recur to dictate and ultimatums or the use of force in circumvention of the UN Charter have never done any good. The outburst of international terrorism, millions of refugees, unprecedented flows of illegal migration are mainly rooted in the adventurous change of "unsuitable regimes" of the recent years, including armed interventions that brought havoc and destruction in the Middle East and Northern Africa and paved the way for terrorists in all the parts of the world where they have never been before.

Despite the fact that ISIL is pulling back in Syria and Iraq, considerable additional effort is required to stabilize the region. It should be recalled that it is necessary to fight not only ISIL, but also al-Nusra, the latter being tolerated for whatever reason by the U.S. coalition members.

The developments in Syria give grounds for cautious optimism. The 6th International Meeting on Syria in Astana, held on 14-15 September 2017, has finalized the work on the four de-escalation zones agreed upon with the participation of Russia, Iran, Turkey, the U.S., Jordan and the UN and supported by many other countries. These agreements have created conditions for further progress towards the implementation of Resolution 2254 on the basis of direct dialogue between the government and the opposition aimed at joining their efforts to eliminate as soon as possible the terrorist hotbed and restore peace all over the country, and its unity, and resolve acute

humanitarian problems.

The most urgent task is to increase the supplies of humanitarian aid and demine the liberated territories. We are convinced that all those who sincerely wish peace to Syria and its people must join their efforts in this process under the leadership of the UN, and without any preconditions.

The cases of use of chemical weapons in the region are a separate issue. All these cases must be investigated honestly and professionally, without any attempts to manipulate OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism.

The solving of humanitarian tasks and reconciliation of conflicting parties are also relevant for other crises in the region, including the situation in Libya, Yemen, and Iraq. In all these situations, just like in any other conflicts, Russia pursues a balanced policy and works with all parties without exception.

Speaking of the Middle East and North Africa regional issues, we cannot put aside or forget the UN decisions on the Palestinian problem and the Arab Peace Initiative. We attach great importance to the restoration of the Palestinian Unity and welcome the efforts of Egypt in this direction. Russia is ready to assist in any way possible the resumption of direct talks between Israel and Palestine, and cooperate with Quartet partners and Arab League for this purpose. The unresolved Palestinian problem continues to be exploited by the extremists who recruit more and more adept.

The never-ending bloody terrorist attacks around the world illustrate the illusory nature of the attempts to create 'isolated safe havens'. Extremism and terrorism can only be fought jointly, without double standards or hidden agendas, and relying on the main responsibility of States, as envisaged in the UN Global Counter-terrorism Strategy.

We welcome the reform of counter-terrorism activity of the UN system, initiated by Secretary-General and approved by the General Assembly. We view the appointment of Russia's representative as head of the new UN Office of Counter-Terrorism as the recognition of Russia's role in combating this evil. We thank everybody for their support.

Russia is committed to the goal of achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world. Under the existing treaty regimes in the area of arms control and non-proliferation, the complete elimination of nuclear weapons should become the final result of the process of universal and total disarmament ensuring equal and indivisible security. The attempts to 'outlaw' the nuclear weapons without taking into account modern realities and turning a blind eye to all the factors that impact the strategic stability today only make this common goal more distant and undermine the consensus regimes of NPT and CTBT.

We launch an appeal to say 'no!' to the militarization of information space. We must prevent the transformation of ICTs into an arena of politico-military confrontation and their use as an instrument of pressure, economic damage, and propaganda of ideas of terrorist and extremist ideology.

The UN must focus its efforts on elaboration of the rules of responsible behavior in the digital sphere that meet the security interests of all states.

Russia has drafted a universal convention on countering cybercrime, including hacking. We propose to open its discussion as early as during the current



Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov

session.

It is obvious that in the future the world will continue to confront a whole range of new long-term challenges affecting all our civilization. We have no right to waste our energy, time and efforts on geopolitical games. This demands collective rather than unilateral approaches.

The process of shaping the polycentric world order is an objective trend that reflects the redistribution of global balance of forces and increasing the factor of cultural and civilizational identity of peoples. All of us, even those used to bossing the world around, will have to adapt to this reality. It is in our common interests not to try and contain this natural process. The world order should become equitable and democratic, just as the founding fathers of the UN envisioned it. Globalization should not antagonize, but play a unifying role, taking into account the interests of all states without exception and contributing to stable and secure future for all humanity.

Without mutual trust, it is impossible to expect effective implementation of the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals or the Paris Climate Agreement, or the solution of global tasks of food security, population, healthcare that are crucial to the developing countries.

The fundamental principles of international relations should include the recognition of political pluralism, freedom of choice and the rule of law. It is necessary to stop relying on military alliances, and provide support and security guarantees to the States that opted for neutrality. As for economy, it is necessary to work on reducing the obstacles to trade and investment, and stop politicizing the economic relations. The international Olympic movement and sports in general should be depoliticized.

It is necessary to educate, first of all, the youth, in the spirit of respect for cultural and civilizational diversity of the modern world. We invite everybody to the 19th World Festival of Youth and Students that will be hosted by Russia in Sochi in less than a month. Another major international event held at the same time will be the 137th Interparliamentary Union Assembly in Saint Petersburg

with its main topic for discussion: "Strengthening of peace and security through intercultural and interreligious dialogue". Let us encourage this dialogue among various cultures and religions, and stop using historic events to instigate hatred and phobias.

The philosophy of coexistence, conjugation and harmonization of interests of various countries is the grounds for President Vladimir Putin's proposed concept of great Eurasian partnership open to all States of Asia and Europe and aimed at the formation of common economic and humanitarian space on the basis of the principle of indivisible security. It goes without saying that equal rights for all, citizens or states, are a

universal requirement as stated, as a matter of fact, in the UN Charter.

Indeed, these just and equitable principles are the grounds for the activities of various institutions in which Russia actively participates: Commonwealth of Independent States, Collective Security Treaty Organization, Eurasian Economic Union, Shanghai Cooperation Organization SCO, and BRICS. In the same way, we build our relations with ASEAN, African Union, CELAC, and other associations of Asian, African and Latin American countries. Through joint efforts we achieve a more balanced approach in the work of such institutions as the G-20, APEC, IMF, and IBRD.

We believe in the vitality of this Organization, and would like that the Secretary-General play an active role in facilitating the full realization of its potential based on the goals and principles of the UN Charter and respecting the prerogatives of the UN intergovernmental bodies. A specially tailored approach is required for the ideas of peacekeeping reform where there should be no abrupt shifts or abandonment of invaluable experience accumulated over the decades.

Two millennia ago, the Roman philosopher Seneca (in his Moral letters to Lucilius) wrote: "We are born to live together". The UN founding fathers came closest to the realization of this fact. They were convinced (as they enshrined in the UN Charter) that God-given coexistence on one planet must compel all of us to unite in order to prevent the scourge of new wars. To be able to do it today we need to revive the culture of dialogue, search for the balance of interests against the instincts of instant solutions and the desire to "punish the disobedient". In essence, it is a matter of preserving humanity in all its wealth and diversity.

Russia has always been and remains open to joint work with all those who show reciprocal readiness to cooperate on the basis of equality. We will continue to uphold these principles in the UN activities the interest of improving global governance and true democratization of international relations. ■

# Who Is My Neighbour?

Indeed who is my neighbour or yours or ours in this weird world in which leaders seem to be bipolar cases lacking medication - saying one thing and meaning another, holding out promises of peace and assistance and blowing up babies the instance the promises are swept under the carpet? What brought the world to such a sorry pass? What indeed!

I suppose that our political leaders pride themselves on the belief that, as PM Deuba mistakenly claimed during the question and answer period at Colombia University, there is no prejudice in Nepal. It's one thing to defend the honour of our nation, but it's another to tell an outright lie in doing so. But he is not the first or only politician to have done so. History is replete with broken promises and lying Statesmen. It's even got its fair share of famous political philanderers: one or two of whom could have given the Hollywood gropers a run for their money.

The world being as 'wondrous large' as it is we don't have to worry about those prejudices that our politicians claim we don't have, except, except except-----, even if we, the hoi polloi don't have them some people do, and what is more it is permitting the misuse of legal authority. As normally happens in a 'clean' administration if you need something you fill in a form and apply. Some dozen years ago, if my memory serves me well, which it usually does, a decision was made about visas and passports. The latter were to be given into the jurisdiction of the district offices and resident ex-pats who had lived and worked here for a certain number of years and could deposit enough money in the bank for their own support could, on reaching retirement age, apply for a retirement visa.

Now, I do think it's worth noting that Nepalese and expats welcomed this regulation alike. It might surprise Mr. Dahal and his faithful cadre but there are quite a sizeable number of expats who have spent a good deal of their adult lives here and have done useful and creative work in Nepali environments and conditions. These people are from almost every section of the globe and they have no religious purpose in coming here. They either came on holiday, fell in love with Nepal or a Nepali and didn't return to their mother lands/ or they came married to someone who had a job to do here and during that time found more useful, humane contributions they could make and when their partner retired they stayed on/ or they were artists. Writers who found an inspiration here they hadn't found anywhere else/ or they were teachers who felt strongly that they could contribute to the education of children in the villages/ or farmers bringing advanced techniques without expensive equipment/ and I could go on.

I am sorry to say this Messrs Dahal et al. but I always did have a suspicion that once you came down out of the hills like the wolves you are on the fold, or to put it more accurately came bleating out of your Delhi hideouts with assurances from our friendly neighbours next door (neighbours who do not fit my definition of neighbours) things would change for ex-pats who do not swing by your offices with stacks of cash and a rich organisation behind them.

Now as I suspected I hear stories of bona fide elders



BY GRETA RANA

being told the retirement visas have been suspended 'for now'. Does this mean people don't get old any more or that our new consortiums are discussing how much more cash they can milk out of 'phoren' cows.

Now that parties we did trust, UML, Congress - even if we did not trust individuals in those parties, the parties had earned names for themselves- are jumping on to bandwagons with 'strange bedfellows' where should we go from here?

Our youth are leaving in droves and anyone who has witnessed them being herded along in Doha or Abu Dhabi as if they were cattle would weep to think of the homes they have left behind.

They work like slaves and are treated like slaves and this is what the Peoples War has brought us!

That's one side of the migration coin, the youths going out. Our government has over the last decade shown its failure to create new jobs for youth. Throwing out elderly ex-pats who want to retire here at their own expense will not adjust the population balance.

Another side is more serious because it involves a much wider swathe of global population and brings the conflicts and emotions that have been held down for generations to the fore- at least in some sections of the populations of Europe.

How long have the continents known about each other's peoples? I mean known in terms of culture; living conditions habits and so forth. What were the ancestral motivations for either seeking other peoples out or hiding away from them?

It seems to me that Before the Common Era as we call it today and all it brought us in new philosophies and sciences etc. the totality of human knowledge was religious and historical. This is not to say that the Bible, Talmud and Koran were stretching over eons of time. I am thinking of the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, The Bhagavad Gita,

The Epic of Gilgamesh and more which were the markers of human history. Each clan had oral traditions and myths too. Some peoples we had heard of but never seen or met- the Chinese managed to evade the rest of the world long enough to invent some of the most useful instruments humans possess. Then came the Pax Romana!

The Romans conquered and ruled the then known world for 700 years. The longest established Empire to this date. They built roads and baths and townscapes and some of their accomplishments have not been bested until this day. The old Roman Roads still exist in many parts of the world and in many others their extant foundations are being uncovered. They are remarkable feats of engineering. More remarkable were the Roman citizenship legislations.

No matter where you were born within the empire you were Roman and equal to every other Roman no matter the colour of your eyes or skin. Those born outside the Empire could apply for citizenship and swear an oath to the Republic. The same regulations applied to them as to those born citizens.

Now readers let me point out that the Romans were cruel too particularly to slaves and criminals: crucifixion was a special forte. Isn't it then surprising that in matters of citizenship and rights of abode they were so far ahead of our democratic leaders of Nepal? ■