

AFCAN REVIEW

Volume 1, 2020



**Association of Former Career Ambassadors
of Nepal (AFCAN)**



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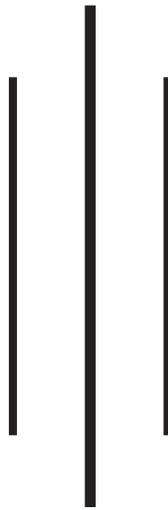
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Foreword

We are happy to publish “AFCAN Review, 2020” of the Association of Former Career Ambassadors of Nepal (AFCAN)”, for the first time, with an objective of bringing out known/unknown facts or events in the fields of foreign affairs and diplomacy in general, and, discussing the important subjects of the greater national interests, in particular.

It is known to all that AFCAN is the sole biggest reservoir of the diplomatic experiences in a form of think-tank, and has been appropriately utilizing its knowledge in the process of policy making and counselling the government, as and when necessary, for adoption of effective foreign policy in the all-round development of Nepal. This effort would further be continued to cover intensively and extensively in many important issues and subjects for analyzing and recognizing the problems with suggestions to make our foreign policy and diplomacy more effective in the complex bilateral, regional and international relations in the years to come.

AFCAN Review, 2020 has come out in a modest form with a promise to comprise and reflect on several other subjects necessary to be dealt with in the future on more challenging bilateral and global prospects. We humbly feel that this small annual review would be beneficial to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies, as well as to the private sectors, including tourism, trade, investment, water resources, manpower too, for their better performance. We also wish to get essential feedback and support from all stake holders.

Last but not the least, our thankful words of appreciation to the members of AFCAN Review Editorial Board would not be out of place, considering their commitments and hard work for this noble cause despite the flavor of season’s festivals. The learned contributors to this Review are praise-worthy for their valuable analyses and outcomes. We are eagerly looking forward to more from them in the future.

May we also avail this opportunity to express our best wishes of Happy New Year, 2021 to everyone.

Dr. Rambhakta P. B. Thakur

Acting President

Association of Former Career Ambassadors of Nepal

Note from the Editorial Board

We feel privileged that the Association of the Former Career Ambassadors of Nepal (AFCAN) entrusted us as the coordinator and members of the Editorial Board for this publication. We are happy over the trust and confidence that the AFCAN reposed on us for the first ever publication by the Association since its establishment in 2007.

Our tasks included collecting and compiling write-ups from the learned and experienced ASFCAN members, editing them, putting the publication into a format as well as getting it printed. Initially, we were scheduled to bring out this publication by the beginning of 2020, but for various reasons we had to wait for a while. Any way, we are happy that it is before the readers now.

The write-ups are in their original form, except that we have corrected few typographical errors that could have missed the attention of the authors. Needless to say, therefore, that the views expressed in the write-ups are those of the authors themselves.

The articles are written by senior, very learned and well experienced former Ambassadors of Nepal. They cover a wide range of areas, are full of insights, and we believe that they would be beneficial to the readers.

As all the write-ups are equally important and valuable, we have put them in an alphabetical order of the names of the authors.

AFCAN had also brought out some occasional publications on topical importance in the past. The AFCAN Review is our maiden endeavor. We invite comments and observations from our valued readers so as to make improvements in the coming issues.

We wish all the readers a very happy New Year 2021 !

Hari Kumar Shrestha
Khaga Nath Adhikari
Niranjan Man Singh Basnyat

AFCAN - An Introduction

-Sundar Nath Bhattarai

The Association of Former Career Ambassadors of Nepal (AFCAN) came into being in 2007. The objectives of AFCAN, as enumerated in its constitution, are, among others, to contribute to the promotion of Nepal's national and international interests in accordance with the country's independent foreign policy of non-alignment, in adherence to the principles of peaceful co-existence and ideals and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, by maintaining the policy of friendship with all and enmity towards none, as pursued by the Government of Nepal. It aims at promoting studies, researches, interactions and dialogues within the Association and outside, providing independent institutional views and advices to the competent authorities of the Government of Nepal on matters of foreign relations, which might, in particular, be helpful in policy formulation and execution.

It may be pertinent to recall here an effort made by a group of our colleagues to form an institution of former ambassadors as back as in December 1999 which was initiated with the participation of foreign affairs stalwarts and former ambassadors like Prof. Yadunath Khanal, Mr. Kul Shekhar Sharma, Mr. Praddhumna Lal Rajbhandari, General Kshetra Bikram Rana, Mr. Jharendra Narayan Singh, Dr. Yadav Prasad Pant , Mr. Shailedra Kumar Upadhyay, Mr. Jagdish Shumsher JB Rana, Mr. Narayan Prasad Aryal and others. They had established an institution known as "Ambassadors' Club" and had also framed its constitution. The Club was registered with the relevant office of then His Majesty's Government of Nepal on Mangsir 22, 2056 BS and was headed by former ambassador to Egypt, Late Mr. Jitendra Raj Sharma as its President. Mr. Surya Prasad Shrestha, former ambassador to the United Kingdom, was the Vice President and Mr. Sundar Nath Bhattarai, the undersigned, became the Secretary General. The "Ambassadors' Club" was open to membership to all those appointed as Ambassadors, irrespective of their allegiance with the foreign service. The Club, so purposefully created, could not have a smooth sailing for a long time mainly due to a great deal of uncoordinated diverse views and lack of unified approach among the members on vital policy objectives, methods and scope of the institution which caused loss of enthusiasm of many of the active stalwarts. As a result, it ceased to be functional.

A group of former career ambassadors, however, took a new initiative towards the establishment of an association of former ambassadors of Nepal. After repeated interactions and continuous dialogue regarding the nature, form, and scope of the conceived institution, they decided to establish the association in its present form. In view of its relevance and the compatibility of its purposes and objectives with those of the Government of Nepal, the association was registered with the Government of Nepal. The membership of the Association, as signified by its very name, is confined

and limited to the Nepali ambassadors appointed from among the professionals serving in the Foreign Ministry and having served in different diplomatic capacities in various missions abroad.

AFCAN, after its inception in its new form in 2007, has been effortful in playing effective role in compliance with the objectives set forth in its constitution, working closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through occasional consultations on matters of importance on foreign relations. During the span of 13 years after its existence, AFCAN is in record of having organised several workshops and seminars on matters of topical importance like Foreign Direct Investment, External Trade, Foreign Employment and Tourism relating to the policy of economic diplomacy pursued by the Government of Nepal, and follow-up interactions with experts in specific fields.

The reports of the seminars which were published and circulated were highly acclaimed. Similarly, two seminars consecutively organised in collaboration with the office of European Union in Kathmandu on Nepal-EU cooperation, first under the stewardship of Mr. Kedar Bhakta Shrestha, former Foreign Secretary and Ambassador to Benelux countries and the EU, and to the United States, and secondly, that of Mr. Madhu Raman Acharya, former Foreign Secretary and Ambassador to Bangladesh and PR to the United Nations, were accorded high importance. Their reports were also widely circulated and appreciated by the readers. Another report of a very important seminar organised by AFCAN on Nepal's water resources with participation of learned scholars and well recognised experts in the field, which came out with various important and useful recommendations, is also being published in the near future for dissemination.

AFCAN has also been organising interaction programmes with Nepalese and foreign scholars and dignitaries. One very popular among them is with foreign Ambassadors resident in Kathmandu for exchange of views on matters of bilateral and ongoing relevant international issues. The event became popularly known as "AFCAN Breakfast Roundtable", which was attended with great interest by almost all foreign resident ambassadors in Nepal, some having attended it in repetition. Important suggestions from ambassadors were duly conveyed, depending upon their consent, to appropriate authorities of the government for necessary consideration and action. Similarly, interactions with newly appointed Nepalese ambassadors preparing to take up their assignments in foreign countries were considered to be immensely useful. Among several others, interactions with the Chairman and members of Indo-Nepal Eminent Persons Group (EPG), constitutional experts and experts on federalism also proved to be of high value and importance.

Having been aware of its own unique character and high relevance on matters of foreign relations, AFCAN is of the view that any institution/s or Think Tanks on foreign relations, which would come into being, may facilitate in-depth studies, researches, exchange of views and discourses in wider perspectives and outlook. AFCAN looks forward to pursuing its objectives, while underlying particular individual nature and identity of such institutions.

AFCAN, during the period of its existence, had to bear some tragic events in the untimely demise of three of its active AFCAN looks forward to presidents, Mr. Prabal Shumsher JB Rana, former Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Mr. Keshav Raj Jha, former Ambassador to France, and lately Mr. Pushker Man Singh Rajbhandari, former Ambassador to Pakistan, which were preceded by the sad demise of two of our other colleagues, Mr. P. Khatiwada, former Ambassador to Bangladesh, and Dr. Singha Bahadur Basnyat, former Ambassador to the United Kingdom, which were irreparable loss to AFCAN and to the country. The members of AFCAN pay their high tribute and respectful homage to all of them and wish for eternal peace of the departed souls.

The publication of the present Review by AFCAN, as we know, contains articles contributed by the members of AFCAN which reflect their personal views on various aspects of foreign relations. In its future issues, however, AFCAN envisages to broaden its scope to accommodate the views of greater number of foreign policy advocates from outside the Association as well. Last but not the least, I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to express my wholehearted appreciation to the members of the Editorial Board for so painstakingly and meticulously contributing to bring out the first ever issue of AFCAN Review in such a candid form.

In view of the effective role that AFCAN has been playing and is endeavouring to play in contributing to the amelioration of Nepal's standing in the domain of foreign relations , it could resolutely be affirmed that AFCAN, with its inherent singular and homogeneous character of an institution, composed of members with long and relevant practical experiences working in the Foreign Ministry and Missions abroad, along with their continued zeal and dedication, could be able to carrying it forward in accomplishing its desired objectives more effectively in the days to come.

Federalism: A new Paradigm in Nepal's Foreign Policy ***Anything 'foreign' must be routed through the Center***



Dr. Dinesh Bhattarai

The primary objective of any country's foreign policy is to safeguard sovereignty, protect independence and territorial integrity, promote national interests and security, ensure economic transformation of the nation and protect its citizens and uplift their living standard. These goals give a sense of purpose and direction to the nation in both short and long-term policy formulations. The conduct of foreign policy is an exercise in translating national goals and interests into tangible actions for the greater good of the nation. So goes the ancient Roman precept, *Salus populi supreme lex*: the good of the nation is the highest law.

Nepal pursues pluralism at home and multipolarity in international relations. It is a united house of diverse societies of multicultural hues. Nepal's time-honored tradition of tolerance for diversity is its national strength. The maintenance of tolerance and harmony in the midst of diversity is an essential ingredient of national unity. This unity ties common aspirations of people living in diverse geographical regions to a bond of allegiance to national independence, territorial integrity, national interest, and prosperity of Nepal. Democracy is the glue to bind all these factors together, and therefore, stands as an indispensable ingredient for nation's survival, dignity, and development.

In the year 1769, when several principalities and petty states were unified into modern Nepal, the architect of the unification drive King Prithvi Narayan Shah aptly conceptualized Nepal as a "yam between two boulders" for the conduct of its foreign policy. This notion underlines the compulsions of the geo-physical setting of the country. He cautioned that geography is a hard reality which the country cannot afford to ignore and alerted the nation to remain ever careful, cautious, and rational in its approach. Hundred years later, Napoleon suggested that to study a nation's geography was to know its foreign policy. The "geographic location" of a country, "still tends to determine the immediate priorities of a state."¹ Geography is important in this century, as it was in earlier centuries- writes Richard Kaplan, a geopolitical analyst, author on foreign affairs and one of the world's "Top 100 Global Thinkers". Nepal figures prominently in terms of its strategic location and human and natural resources

¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*, New York: BasicBooks, 1997, p.38.

endowments in the foreign policy discourses of its neighbours and major powers. This gives Nepal the potential to influence the future of its neighbours and the direction of their phenomenal rise as global economic and political powerhouses, and thus, remains a stabilizing factor for global peace, stability, security, and development.

Federalism in Nepal is in early phase of implementation and still an evolving process. This write-up is an attempt to discuss foreign policy agenda in federal system of governance, constitutional frameworks for foreign policy, present a comparative picture of power-distribution in federal structure, geopolitics and federalism and concludes with suggestions.

The Constitution of Nepal 2015 on Federalism

The Preamble to the Constitution of Nepal written by the people's representatives and promulgated on September 20, 2015, states "We, the sovereign people of Nepal, internalizing the people's sovereign rights and right to autonomy and self-rule, while maintaining freedom, sovereignty, territorial integrity, national unity, independence and dignity of Nepal, promulgate this constitution, through the Constituent Assembly, in order to fulfil the aspirations for sustainable peace, good governance, development and prosperity through the federal, democratic, republican system of governance."² The constitution commits the nation to preserving and protecting its independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, national unity, freedom, and dignity.

The constitution defines national interest of Nepal in Article 5, which states: (1) "safeguarding of the freedom, sovereignty, territorial integrity, nationality, independence, and dignity of Nepal, the rights of the Nepalese people, border security, economic well-being and prosperity shall be the basic elements of the national interests of Nepal." (2) "Any conduct and act contrary to the national interest shall be punishable by the Federal Law."³ In the constitutional history of Nepal, this is the first time the present constitution- the seventh in the series since 1946- has clearly outlined the elements of Nepal's national interests.

With this constitution, Nepal makes a democratic transition from centuries old unitary system of governance to a federal republic system of governance. Under the federal set up, there are 7 provinces and 753 local-level political-administrative units consisting of metropolitan, municipal, and village councils. The functioning of federal structure in the country started after the three-tier elections were held for the federal, provincial, and local levels in 2017 under the new constitution.

2 *The Constitution of Nepal: Government of Nepal, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs: Law Books Management Board, October 2016, pp.1-2.*

3 *Ibid, p. 4.*

The Constitution of Nepal 2015 defines Nepali nation as collectively constituting multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-cultural characteristics. Unique unity in a vast diversity has remained the indissoluble feature of Nepali society across the country. This makes Nepali nationalism based on national unity among the diverse ethnic groups, and not on religion, language, and ethnicity. Within the framework of the constitution, it is the task of the national leadership to articulate the conduct of foreign policy in the federal set up. It may be recalled here how the first Prime Minister of independent India Jawaharlal Nehru used to write to the chief ministers to make them understand the unfolding global political and technology trends, and the need to adjust to them within a constitutional framework.

Why Federalism?

Federalism is described as the “form of political organization suited to communities where the territorially diversified pattern of values, interests, and beliefs and traditions can be effectively implemented by joint efforts in the pursuit of common values and interests, and the cultivation of common beliefs and traditions.”⁴ It is believed that federalism accommodates people’s say and share, voice, and choice in the governance according to their needs. It also helps overcome clientelism and tribal/clan politics. Federalism unites diversity and accepts the differences. This is key to democratic power sharing and resolving conflict in multicultural societies. The integration of different ethnic groups, languages, cultures through political institutions is an important issue, and this is better managed through the federal structures. Some see federalism playing “an important role for the consolidation of deeply divided societies”⁵ like South Africa.

Federalism is a tool for modern constitutions “seeking peaceful conflict solutions in multiethnic societies.”⁶ Federal structure provides an institutional framework to give unity to the nation, ensure that no societal group is discriminated against, every ethnic and cultural group has a fair chance of exercising influence through political institutions, and maintain a certain degree of unity in case diverging minority interests threaten to destabilize a national community. Federalism is a basic constitutional principle and a vital and omnipresent element of Swiss politics. With four national languages (German, French, Italian and Romansh), Swiss federalism fulfils an important function in safeguarding multilingual and multicultural society with different religious creeds. It

4 Carl J. Friedrich, *Constitutional Government and Democracy*, Delhi: Oxford & IBH, 1968, p.189.

5 Rene Lemarchand, *Ethnic Conflict in Contemporary Africa. Four Models in Search of Solution*, in Gunther Bachler (ed.), *Federalism Against Ethnicity? Institutional, Legal and Democratic Instruments to Prevent Violent Minority Conflicts* (Chur: Ruegger, 1997), pp.95-106 in Wolf Linder, *Swiss Democracy, Possible Solutions to Conflict in Multicultural Societies, Third Edition, Revised and Updated*, Palgrave Macmillan 2010, p. 181.

6 Thomas Fleiner, in Lidija R. Basta Fleiner and Thomas Fleiner (eds.), *Federalism and Multiethnic States: The Case of Switzerland*, Geneva: Institut du Federalisme Fribourg, Suisse, Vol 16, 2nd Revised Edition preface.

has 26 constituent states of very dissimilar size and population and they find a common bind in federalism. The Swiss constitution attaches much value to cooperation between federal and cantonal authorities.

Until a few decades ago, the conduct of foreign policy was the exclusive domain of national governments. After the end of the Cold War, provincial and local voices have made their forays into foreign policy and the roles of sub-federal units are increasing in daily matters that go to affect interstate relations, with the onset of globalization and liberalization of economy. The role of non-state actors, non-governmental organizations, multinational corporations that were once in the periphery, have come to play important roles and influence in shaping the policies of the government towards other countries. This calls for critical synthesis, dialogue, and analysis of new developments for managing the complexities of growing diversity in contemporary times for the nation to speak with one voice on issues of national importance-national interest, security, and dignity.

The Constitution of Nepal endows the central government with all the relevant powers for the conduct of foreign affairs. Foreign and defense policy remains the exclusive preserve of the federal government. The Center remains the sole international diplomatic voice of the country at all times and under all circumstances. Provincial and local level governments are strictly forbidden from dealing with any of the issues listed as subjects under the federal government. Whatever capacities and expertise they may have will have to be used in consultation, coordination, and with consent of the federal government only. Provinces may display temptations to cultivate foreigners to bring international investments from bilateral, multilateral sources and multinational companies in the name of improving their social and physical infrastructures, but they shall have to do it through the channel of the central government.

Constitutional Guidelines regarding Nepal's Foreign Policy

The constitution provides guidelines for the conduct of foreign policy. They are provided in part 4 under the Directive Principles, Policies and Obligations of the State, Article 50 (4), which states: "The state shall direct its international relations towards enhancing the dignity of the nation in the world community by maintaining international relations on the basis of sovereign equality, while safeguarding the freedom, sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence and national interest of Nepal."⁷ Policies of the State under Article 51 (a) include among others 1. "to keep intact the national unity, while protecting the freedom, sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Nepal, 2. to promote the national unity while developing mutual cooperative relations between the Federal Units by maintaining mutual cohesion, harmony and solidarity between various castes, tribes, religions, languages, cultures and communities."⁸

7 *The Constitution of Nepal: Government of Nepal, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs: Law Books Management Board, October 2016, n.2, Ibid, p. 28.*

8 *Ibid, pp.28-29.*

The State Policies relating to international relations are mentioned in Article 51 (m) which reads: “(1) To conduct an independent foreign policy based on the Charter of the United Nations, non-alignment, the principles of Panchsheel, international law and the norms of world peace, taking into consideration of the overall interest of the nation, while remaining active in safeguarding the sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence and national interest of Nepal. (2) To review treaties concluded in the past, and make treaties, agreements based on equality and mutual interest.”⁹

Power-distribution in Federal Structure: A Comparative Picture

In relation to Distribution of State Power, Articles 57(1) and 109, Schedule 5 of the constitution of Nepal 2015 include the subjects that come under federal powers/ jurisdictions covering prominently, among others 1. defense and army, protection of national unity and territorial integrity, national security, 2. foreign and diplomatic affairs, international relations and United Nations related matters, war and defence, 3. arms and ammunitions factories and production, 4. Central Police, Armed Police Force, national intelligence, and investigation, peace and security, 5. central planning, central bank, finance, banking and monetary policies, foreign grants, aid, and loans, 6. international treaties or agreements, extradition, mutual legal assistance and international borders, international boundary rivers, 7. citizenship, passport, visa, and immigration, 8. atomic energy, air space and astronomy, 9. intellectual property (including patent, design, trademarks, copyrights), 10. security printing, 11. sites of archaeological importance and ancient monuments.¹⁰ The matters of provinces are given in Schedule-6, and the exercise of such authority shall be done in accordance with this Constitution and the Federal law. The concurrent/shared power of the federation and the province shall be exercised as per the laws made by the Federal Parliament and Provincial Assembly.

Article 58 of the Constitution is about the residual powers. It categorically stipulates, “The Federation shall have the power on any matter not enumerated in the Federal List, State List and List of Local Level or Concurrent List or on any matter which is not so specified in this Constitution as to be exercised by any level.”¹¹ Under Article 232, federal government may give necessary direction to any State Council of Ministers on matters of national importance and on matters to be coordinated between the states. There is an Inter-State Council under Article 234 to settle political dispute arising between the Federation and a State and between States.¹² Federal laws prevail to maintain coordination between the Federal, State and Local Levels.

⁹ *Ibid*, pp.42-43.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 44-45, To be read together with Schedule-5, (Relating to clause (1) of Article 57, and Article 109), pp.243-245.

¹¹ *Ibid*, pp.45-46.

¹² *Ibid*, pp.150-153.

Under the Constitution, all three levels of the federal structure: center, provinces and local level units are required to work for protecting Nepal's independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, autonomy, national interests, overall development, multi-party competitive democratic republic and federal system of governance, human rights and fundamental rights, rule of law, separation of powers and check and balance, equitable society based on plurality and equality, and inclusive representation and identity. In Part 20, Article 232, it is explicitly stated that federalism in Nepal is based on the principles of cooperation, coexistence, and coordination.

In countries that have adopted federal set up, they have developed towards a much more centralistic power-division on matters of foreign policy than in internal politics. External relations remain the monopoly of the federal governments which maintain federal supervision and federal coercion to maintain the unity of the country and ensure the coherence and credibility of foreign policy. Sub-federal units can play important roles in helping to educate citizens about foreign policy issues through public debates and discourses. Switzerland, which is officially known as the Swiss Confederation, empowers the central authority, and "federal law overrides state law,"¹³ and its constitution explicitly states, "foreign affairs are a federal matter (Art. 54 par. 1)."¹⁴ "The Confederation shall strive to preserve the independence of Switzerland and its welfare; it shall, in particular, contribute to alleviate need and poverty in the world, and to promote respect for human rights, democracy, the peaceful coexistence of nations, and the preservation of natural resources. It shall take into consideration the powers of the Cantons and shall protect their interests."¹⁵

It states that the Cantons shall participate in the preparation of decisions of foreign policy which concern their powers or their essential interests, and the most important part of the foreign policy of the Cantons, however, is mainly "restricted to inter-cantonal relations rather than to international relations." Article 49 par.1 asserts that "federal law takes precedence over contrary cantonal law... Any legal rule emanating from a federal authority overrides conflicting cantonal law, regardless of the latter's hierarchical level."¹⁶ Par. 2 of the same Article directs the federation to ensure that the cantons respect federal law. Based on Art. 54 par. 1 Const., the federation has a comprehensive competency to conclude treaties, even if the subject-matter falls within the domain of cantonal powers.¹⁷

13 Walter Haller, *The Swiss Constitution in a Comparative Context*, Zurich: Dike, 2009, p.76.

14 *Ibid.*, p.65.

15 Thomas Fleiner, *Foreign Politics/Policies, National Pluralism and Globalization in the first decade of the 21st Century, The Case of Switzerland*, Institute of Federalism, University of Fribourg, in Ferran Requejo (ed.), *Foreign policy of constituents units at the beginning of 21st century*, 2010, Generalitat de Catalunya. Institut d'Estudis Autònoms, Barcelona 2010. P.146.

16 Walter Haller, n.13, p.76.

17 *Ibid.*, p.235.

Article I and II of the Constitution of the United States of America place primacy for the conduct of foreign and military affairs squarely with Congress and the President.¹⁸ One of the founding fathers of the United States and the fourth American President James Madison's statement mentioned in the Federalist Paper no. 42 states that the powers to conduct foreign affairs constitute "an obvious and essential branch of the federal administration." He further wrote "if we are to be one nation in any respect, it clearly ought to be in respect to other nation." This categorically spells that the power to set policy must reside at the federal level, and nation must speak with one voice. States are expressly forbidden by Article I, Section 10, of the Constitution from entering into treaties, alliances, agreements, or compacts with foreign powers; from making war; and from laying certain taxes on foreign commerce without congressional consent.¹⁹ The United States Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story, is cited, who in his influential 1833 treatise on the Constitution, wrote that "notwithstanding our boasts of freedom and independence," Americans were victims "of our own imbecility" in relations with other countries under the Articles of Confederation, because states insisted on conducting foreign policy themselves. "Despite the otherwise welcome invigoration of federalism in the legislative and judicial branches of government, Washington still must be given pride of place in the conduct of foreign affairs and the regulation of foreign commerce. Without the central government's lead, the United States risks returning to the Balkanization of its national interests that necessitated the Constitution in the first place."²⁰

Though the US constitution does not specifically mention federal coercion, it seems to imply this; in practice, for example, coercive measures against the states were unavoidable in order to implement School desegregation.²¹ The melting pot concept is reflected in the constitution of the United States which stipulates: "We, the people of the United States..." and is guided by the motto of "e pluribus unum"- out of many, one.

One of the leading theoreticians of federalism said: "federalism and a spirited foreign policy go ill together."²² At the level of the centralizing approach, Prof. Kenneth Wheare has asserted that a monopoly of foreign affairs is a "minimum power" of all federal governments.²³ In his landmark study, he highlighted "the negative consequences

18 Brannon P. Denning and Jack H. McCall, *States' Right and Foreign Policy: Something should be left to Washington, Foreign Affairs, Vol.79, No.1, January/February 2000, p.12.*

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.*, p. 14

21 *The case of Cf. Brown v. Board of Education of Topeca (Brown II)*, 349 U.S. 294 (1955) is cited wherein in 1957 President Eisenhower dispatched troops to enforce the enrollment of black children at an all-white high school in Little Rock, Arkansas, n.13, p.79.

22 K.C. Wheare, *Deputy Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Privy Council Office, Government of Canada cited in George Anderson, Canadian Federalism and Foreign Policy, Canada-United States Law Journal, Vol. 27:45, 2001, p.45.*

23 K.C. Wheare, *Federal Government (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967)*, cited in Stephane Paquin, *Federalism and Multi-level Governance in Foreign Affairs: A comparison: A Comparison of Canada and Bel-*

of an unbundling of central control over foreign affairs for the national interest and for the functioning of the international system." In the same vein, Robert Davis has maintained that "questions concerning international relations are at the heart of federal regimes." 24 If a power of co-decision is granted in federal states regarding foreign affairs, "this risks paralyzing a state's foreign affairs and harming the state's image in the international arena."25

Canada's leading and most widely circulated newspaper *Globe and Mail* editorialized stating that, "Even the most decentralized federations reserve one power for the central government: the power to represent the country abroad. In foreign affairs, a nation must speak with one voice."²⁶ It further says, "To give a role to the provinces with respect to international affairs "is a recipe for diplomatic disaster."²⁷ Another English language daily added, "The idea is ridiculous. Operating on the international stage– at the United Nations, signing treaties, declaring and ending wars– is one of the core functions of a national government."²⁸

Indian constitution empowers the center with authority over all foreign relations matters making the conduct of foreign policy center oriented. In case of conflict, national parliament laws prevail over those of the state legislative assemblies. Under Article 248 of the Indian constitution, Parliament has exclusive power to make any law with respect to any matter not enumerated in the Concurrent list or State list.²⁹ Unlike in the United States where governors are elected, Indian government appoints governors to act as center's representatives.

Federalism: A new Paradigm in Foreign Policy

Nepal entered into modernity following the popular revolution of 1950-51. Nepali diplomacy took off after 1950 and the process of diversifying diplomatic and economic relations started. This process has bearings on both domestic and international agenda and the country's approach to managing certain foreign policy issues.

Both national and international forces influence foreign policy agenda like peace, security, human rights, trade, technology, and environment. As diplomatic and development activities have considerably expanded over the years with the evolution of global political and economic forces followed by historic democratic transformation of the country, Nepal's foreign policy over the years has also acquired a global character.

gium, n.15, p. 163.

24 R. Davis, "The Federal Principle Reconsidered" in A. Wildavsky, ed., *American Federalism in Perspective* (Boston: Little Brown, 1967), n.15, p.163.

25 F. Scharpf, "The Joint-Decision Trap: Lessons from the German Federalism and European Integration" (1988) 66(3) *Pub. Admin.* 239-278, cited in Stephane Paquin, *Federalism and Multi-Level Governance in Foreign Affairs: A Comparison of Canada and Belgium*, n.15, P.164.

26 *The Globe and Mail*, "Why Canada Speaks for Quebec Abroad," Editorial, on 5 October 2005, cited in *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*

28 *The Ottawa Citizen*, "One Country, One Voice," Editorial, 5 October 2005, cited in *Ibid.*

29 https://www.india.gov.in/sites/upload_files/npi/files/coi_part_full.pdf

The influence of international thoughts and concepts are apparent in the inviolability of the fundamental human rights that have been embedded in the constitution. Nepal's becoming a party to several international conventions/instruments has a profound impact on the domestic laws.

As Nepal is in a federal system of governance in place of unitary system, there are sub-national units operating throughout the country. There is a growing tendency and temptation on part of the sub-national units like provinces approaching international institutions for foreign aid, loans, grants to improve their physical and social infrastructures. They all come with donors' interests and seek to influence and infiltrate into the system in various ways. It should be clear from the start that the final authority should be with the center in accessing external assistance. Negotiations shall have to be carried out by adhering to certain norms for strength and clarity in the best interests of the nation. Sub-units may be consulted, but the center has the primacy in setting up the foreign policy agenda and steering the ship of the state through the turbulent waters of global politics. Adequate institutional safeguards should be developed at all levels to ensure that any foreign assistance is fully aligned with national interests and compatible with national priorities and routed through the center.

In the first three years of federalism, enough wrinkles have been seen in the conduct of foreign policy. These wrinkles have emanated from the foreign policy behaviour of political leaders, center-province relations, provincial leaders' meetings with foreign dignitaries, and the temptation of provincial chief ministers, ministers and representatives at the local governments to cultivate foreign governments and their representatives bypassing the center in entirety. Despite the clear delineation of authorities in the constitution, leaders have shown a tendency to be more unitary and center-centric than being cooperative, thereby creating a confrontational and paternalistic environment. Provincial and local units may appear politically weak, but they are constitutionally strong with parallel powers. There should be enough consultation and coordination with provinces. If they are not sounded, consulted, and coordinated on issues of their immediate concerns like agriculture, health, climate change and preservation of the environment, they can be obstructive. However, provincial and local authorities must report to the center any issue that has external dimensions not excluding cross border issues.

There has to be a whole of government approach to the conduct of foreign policy and issues of foreign aid and economic policy matters. National consensus is needed to be an effective voice and partner in the comity of nations. As the country continues to excessively depend on foreign economic resources, Nepal should be extraordinarily careful of what comes into the country, what goes where, for what purpose, how it is used and on whom. It is no secret that it is through foreign aid, loans and grants that external powers come to promote their own strategic and economic interests. Though they are a big need for resources-starved countries like Nepal, it must be understood

that these are powerful tools to lure the countries and their leaders to donors' positions, and interests. These resources are often reported to have been grossly misappropriated for meeting short term goals and selfish ends.

While it is absolutely essential to have goodwill, cooperation and support of foreign friends and well-wishers in the international community, it is equally essential that their assistances are fully aligned to the national priorities and pressing needs of the country and use of such aid is fully regulated and monitored by national institutions to make it complementary to national efforts. It has been in practice in federal system of governance that code of conduct is followed by sub-national authorities at all levels that include meetings with foreigners, and movements of authorities outside the country. Failure on part of the federal government to effectively introduce and enforce necessary diplomatic code of conduct to be adhered to by leaders and officials of the provincial governments including their chief ministers has caused confusion, resulting in controversies time and again.

There is a growing tendency on part of chief ministers directly seeking assistance for development in their provinces without coordination, consultation with and consent from the central government. It should be made mandatory that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) is informed of meetings with political leaders and activists to ensure necessary coordination and for institutional records. A rush is seen on part of village councils /municipalities to forge sisterly relations with cities of foreign countries.

Recently, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has deputed seven foreign service officers to provinces to help provincial authorities to follow diplomatic norms and practices in meeting with foreign dignitaries and keep institutional records. It is a long-held practice in countries with federal system that any chief minister or ministers or any sub-national units should seek permission/clearance from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before meeting foreign ambassadors/dignitaries and submit records for institutional memory.

Geopolitics and Federalism

Location has always been an important determinant of foreign policy. Nepal's location is marked by unprecedented economic dynamism and opportunities. The most significant economic and geopolitical development has been the rise of role, influence and power of Nepal's neighbours China followed by India on the world stage. As they work to seek regional and global primacy, Nepal's strategic location acquires greater geopolitical significance for both of her neighbours and major powers. Even the delimitation of Nepal's federated provinces does not remain without geopolitical significance for them.³⁰ The flurry of geopolitical activity across the provinces is indicative of this trend.

30 Of the seven federal provinces of Nepal, six share borders both with India in the South and China in the north. Province no. 2 has border only with India.

External forces have played different roles in Nepal's democratic transitions. Indian factor has been predominant. This role was greater during the democratic transformation of in 2006-07, following the signing of twelve point Understanding between the agitating Seven Political Parties (SPA) and Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) in New Delhi in November 2005. This Understanding recognized the need for a "forward looking restructuring of the State." India "played a very important role in the political evolution of Nepal clearing the way for the Maoists to join the political mainstream."³¹ The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed between the Government of Nepal and Maoists in November 2006 formally mainstreamed Maoist armed rebels into peaceful constitutional democratic politics. The CPA incorporated the involvement of the United Nations to assist in the peace process. UN Secretary General (UNSG) Ban Ki-moon recognized India's role, and "thanked India for her engagement in Nepal and said that its role is important for the successful transition of Nepal to democracy and stability."³² The UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) was given the mandate to monitor "the management of arms and armed personnel of both sides, to assist in the monitoring of ceasefire agreements, and to provide technical support for the planning, preparation and conduct of the election of a Constituent Assembly in a free and fair atmosphere, in consultations with the parties."³³

Nepal shares an 1880 km long open and unregulated border with India. Perhaps Nepal and India are the only two independent and sovereign countries that have open border and people from either side can travel to other side without any immigration/passport formalities. These arrangements have allowed developments on either side of the border to impact on the daily life of the people in both the countries. But when ethnic issues traverse national borders, internal issues acquire external dimensions and get internationalized. Cross border cultural, lingual and kinship links between Nepal and India show an ethnic kinship between the people of the Terai-Madhesh in Nepal and across the border in India. A great ethnic, linguistic, and social diversity in the Terai plains makes it even more complicated.

31 Former Foreign Secretary of India Shyam Saran's Interview to The Kathmandu Post, "India isn't constantly trying to subvert Nepali politics" at <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/printedition/news/2013-01-13/monday-interview-244072.html>, January 13, 2013.

The then External Affairs Minister of India, Pranab Mukherjee told Al Jazeera on January 27, 2009, "We persuaded the political parties that resorted to the gun and violence, the Maoists in Nepal, that they give up violence, participate in mainstream national political activities. They agreed, heard our political advice and now in collaboration with other democratic parties, they have formed the government."

32 India's role in peace process crucial: Ban, April 28, 2012, at <http://www.ekantipur.com/2012/04/28/top-story/indias-role-in-peace-process-crucial-ban/353087.html>. UNSG was quoted mentioning that India's role in Nepal's peace process will be more useful as the United Nations, which used to be deeply involved in the process, has now just a small team in Nepal.

33 "Security Council Establishes United Nations Political Mission in Nepal, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1740 (2007), January 23, 2007, at <http://www.un.org/press/en/2007/sc8942.doc.htm>

Though Terai-Madhesh is purely an internal matter of Nepal, India sees it as an external problem with an internal dimension. Whatever happens in Terai-Madhesh, India considers it to be of great importance. India has time and again thrown its geopolitical weight in the name of the people in Terai-Madhesh, the most recent example of it being in the wake of the promulgation of the new constitution of Nepal on September 20, 2015. The promulgation of the constitution written by the people's representatives and endorsed by over 90% of members of the Constituent Assembly was the culmination of seventy years of incessant people's struggle for democracy. The Government of India sent its foreign secretary as Prime Minister's special envoy to stop the promulgation, but Nepal refused to be dictated. India took this as Kathmandu's defiance of New Delhi's strategic imperatives and imposed undeclared economic blockade on Nepal in order to coerce and bring the "recalcitrant" neighbour into its line. The blockade came at a most distressing time for the Nepalis. It remains inexplicable to this day as to why the largest democracy and Nepal's most important neighbour behaved the way it did when Nepal was moving ahead towards the institutionalization of the democratic process.

For the first time, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, Nepal temporarily closed its open border with India to stop the flow of people from either side with a view to contain the spread of coronavirus. The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic led to the tightening of borders to check the movements of the peoples across the globe. Deriving a lesson from this, Nepal should work for regulating the border and for monitoring the movements of people across the border without causing any inconveniences.

Nepal's border with China (1415 kms) on the north adjoining the Tibet Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China is separated by the high Himalayas, which are no longer impenetrable as they once used to be. This makes Nepal-Tibet border to be of geopolitical significance given the presence of Tibetan refugees across the world, majority of them being in India, and Nepal being a transit route for them.

Some political parties in Nepal wanted to establish an ethnic federalism with right to self-determination as a means of state restructuring. There are widely held views that first elected sovereign Constituent Assembly failed to frame a constitution because of competitive geopolitics. "Nepal's northern neighbour China has special concern about Nepal's federalism considering its impact on its soft belly Tibet. It seems over the years through several mediums that China does not want to see ethnic federalism in the borders adjoining China. The Chinese skepticism can be understood because of its concerns for the protection of Tibet from any risk that may disturb China."³⁴ Chinese leaders were quoted to "have expressed concern over the increasing foreign interference in Nepal in the pretext of federating states," and cautioned "of conspiracies being hatched by some international power centers to disintegrate the country in

34 Rudra Sharma, *Federal Dispute Settlement in Nepal, India, and U.S.A.*, in Rudra Sharma, *Federal Dispute Settlement in Nepal, India and United States*, Kathmandu: Yuva Bikaska Lagi Sambaidhanik Kenra, 2019), p.14.

the name of adopting a federal structure."³⁵ China's state newspaper Global Times quotes a Nepal police officer saying that "more Western and Indian political forces are attempting to turn Nepal as a "center of geopolitical interest which targets China," and goes on to attribute a Nepali journalist telling the Global Times, "Some Indians want Nepal to be their protected state, whereas Westerners want to make their stronghold here to watch and conduct anti-China activities."³⁶

The intersection of these activities is indicative of how susceptible Nepal's federalism and geopolitics are to neighbours' concerns and interests, and how delicate is the handling of the cross-border issues in interstate relations.

Conclusion

Federalism has its own share of problems and challenges. For a country like Nepal, democracy, nationalism, and development remain synonymous. Diplomacy based on realism and certain guiding principles should become a reliable tool of external security. A sensible foreign policy should remain rational, and predictable, with no surprises. In Nepal, foreign policy issues are talked by everyone, at all levels, but there are no serious, dedicated discourses. It is good to have awareness at all levels, but issues of national interests, security and dignity must not be taken lightly, without understanding the clarity and gravity of issues. The country should stay informed and prepared to address and confront issues that affect its national interests, image, and dignity.

The task is not easy given the geopolitical complex, underdevelopment, excessive dependence on external economic resources, and lack of a firm, determined and visionary leadership. There is a tendency to look to external powers. The most dangerous is the vulnerability of the Nepali leadership and political parties to look to external political persuasion and influence which momentarily advances their political objectives undermining the long-term interests of the nation. Such circumstances, as B.P. Koirala feared, pave the way for foreign powers to start intrigues and make Nepal a center of international conspiracy, and cautioned that preponderance of self-seeking, communalism (regionalism), individualistic mentality and tendency to look to foreign hands makes, "nationalism the first casualty."³⁷

35 Mohan Baidya, *Chairman of CPN-Maoist, a breakaway faction of UCPN-Maoist, made these remarks upon his return from a goodwill visit to China. Available at http://zeenews.india.com/news/south-asia/china-concerned-over-foreign-interferencein-nepal_790090.html, July 27, 2012.*

36 Hu Yuwei, *Who is behind the fabricated reports provoking Nepal against China?* <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1206402.shtml>, November 10, 2020.

37 B.P. Koirala, *Appeal to the Countrymen issued on the eve of returning home in December 1976 after 8 years of exile in India, in Sushil Koirala (ed.), Democracy Indispensable for Development, Varanasi: Sandaju Publications, 1982, p.137.*

The major challenge of Nepal's federalism is keeping the country united as a melting pot of multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multilingual groups. The degree of cultural and ethnic heterogeneity has tremendous potentials for ethnic based disharmony, generating flashpoints and fault lines within and provide a fertile ground for ethnic conflicts. Lately, under different pretexts in this strategically sensitive country, foreign efforts are on in carrying out cultural transformation and social engineering to weaken the time-honoured social cohesion of lasting unity and stability and fueling the feelings of US vs THEM. The everyday challenge of federal Nepal is to maintain a foreign policy that best serves the interests of people, protects its historic independence and sovereignty and ensures development within an overall framework of democratic polity in the best interests of the people and the country. The call of the time is to promote the institutions of integration, national democratic institutions, strengthen foreign policy establishment and national capacity, earn goodwill and support of neighbours and friends in the international community in order to ensure the process of socio-economic transformation for improving the quality of life of the people.

These are challenging times. The conduct of foreign policy has become more complex and sensitive. The end of the Cold War, disintegration of the Soviet Union, onset of economic globalization, rise of China closely followed by India as global powers along with the advancement of technological innovation have all created new frontiers of diplomacy. The role of non-state actors, public opinions, multinational corporations, and cultural organizations that were once on the periphery of traditional diplomacy have emerged to become important players. This brings the complex geopolitics heavily impacting and influencing the conduct of Nepal's international relations. Cross border issues attract disproportionate attention at the local levels on a daily basis, and the center has to be cautious, careful and rational not to let the people face inconveniences and at the same time, bring such issues through the routes of the central government. In such a complex and challenging scenario, building national institutions and strengthening the intellectual foundations of foreign policy establishment should be the pressing priority of the nation to navigate the complexities and challenges. A leading geopolitical analyst Robert Kaplan warns: "If the Nepalese government cannot increase state capacity, the state itself could gradually dissolve."³⁸

For the sake of national unity, policy clarity, consistency, credibility, and strength of national position, for a country like Nepal, anything foreign must go through the center and that is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The alternative is sure to pave a network of intriguing tentacles and conspiratorial designs for larger game in strategically sensitive location, putting Nepal's existence at stake. "Nepal must walk the diplomatic tightrope when relations between these two neighbours- India and China, whose friendship and goodwill she values so much show signs of strain."³⁹ While Nepal remains respectful

38 Robert Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells US About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate*, New York: Random House, 2012, accessed in ebook.

39 Rishikesh Shah, *Foreign Policy*, in Pashupati Shumshere J.B. Rana and Kamal P. Malla (ed), *Nepal in Perspective*, Kathmandu: Center for Economic Development and Administration, 1973, p.259.

and sensitive to the interests and concerns of its neighbours, it expects them to be equally sensitive and respectful to Nepal's interests and concerns. It has been the long-standing policy and position of Nepal not to allow its territory to be used for any activity against its neighbours. We must ensure that our approach is pragmatic, principled, and cognizant of the geographical realities. Nepal's policy should be of balancing, not show temptation for aligning, and at the same time remain constructively engaged with the wider international community for the long-term interest of the nation.

Need for Dynamism in Nepal's Foreign Relations



Gyan Chandra Acharya

Introduction

As we move forward in a post transition situation in Nepal, it is important that we pursue a right strategy and resolute pathways for our national policies as well as for the conduct of foreign policy to steer our collective efforts towards achieving the objectives of inclusive progress, stability and prosperity in the country.

It is clear that a well thought-out and prudent conduct of the foreign policy of Nepal with a forward looking outlook will have a pivotal role in effectively pursuing our broader national interests. The low level of economic development, limited resources, structural constraints and our common aspirations to speed up rapid, sustainable and inclusive economic progress demand more robust and comprehensive cooperation from the international community. But it takes a strong, development oriented national leadership and partnership of all stakeholders to ensure such progress. An enlightened and committed national ownership should go hand in hand with enhanced international support and cooperation to bring effective results on the ground.

Geostrategic Consideration

This is more so for a country, which is strategically located and which has maintained its independence throughout its history, despite so many trials and tribulations. Now that the strategic competition in the neighbourhood and at the global level is sharpening, we must be prescient to steer our policies with prudent approach and consistency to ensure that our longer term interests are kept uppermost in our mind. We have to engage with all, while also ensuring that we do not get caught in entanglement. This requires clarity, consistency, wider vision, deeper analysis, clear articulation, profound and continuous communications and the capacity to look beyond the present.

With an in-depth and comprehensive analysis, consistency and cohesion, and due regard to all facets of our foreign relations and their interrelationships, we can strengthen and effectively enhance our broader national interests on a sustainable basis. Furthermore, as we have adopted a federal structure, the central government should have a strong coordination mechanism so that all federal units would also follow them. The sensitivity and the profound impact of foreign relations should not be taken lightly.

As our political transition was rather long and arduous, we hardly spent time reflecting on and promoting our larger national interests in a more holistic and effective manner. Ad hoc approach and short term considerations were dominant. It is time that we started a proactive and result-oriented diplomacy, while articulating better how our journey towards a post-conflict inclusive and prosperous society could be transformative. Neither impromptu response nor a low level equilibrium is in the long-term interest of the country.

While we appreciate some active engagements with all the major powers of late, we have yet to see how far we have been able to make the best use of engagements with them and to what extent it has enhanced mutual understanding, mutual appreciation of each other's aspirations and support and cooperation. We should continue to analyze their impacts going forward and adjust our responses in timely manner.

We are all very good at articulating a vision and setting some objectives. However, we are less proficient in devising right strategy because we lack in-depth research and multidimensional analysis. We have yet to improve coordination skills, rigor and discipline. Even in the best of times, it is a difficult task to ensure effective coordination among all the players. This is not only specific to foreign affairs, it has been a common feature in many other areas as well. We need to change it, given that the stakes are now much higher than before.

In a highly competitive and globalised world, we must strengthen our internal cohesion and capacity and reap due benefits from an interconnected world. There are many countries around the world with similar features like ours, which have been able to minimize constraints and maximize opportunities. The conduct of foreign policy is a serious business in all countries, but it holds a greater premium in countries where there is a disproportionate dependence on external interactions.

There are two approaches to look at the foreign policy related issues: sector specific approach and country/region specific approach. They are closely interlinked yet they can be analyzed separately for the purpose of ease and clarity.

Under sector specific approach, peace, security and stability-related issues are fundamental to any country. As we are situated in a strategic region, with ascendant global and regional powers and competitive policies amongst them, we must look at the security and stability related issues with our own long term interests in a holistic manner. We must consistently analyze how the neighboring countries and the global powers are looking at the security related issues and how they intersect with ours. Correct evaluation and appropriate response is key to success. We do not want to be part of any security alliance, but that does not mean that we are oblivious to carving of spheres of influence by others. Similarly, development and prosperity-related issues and structural transformation of economy are not only economic issues, they are intricately linked with our long-term stability and prosperity. Given the geographic

specificity of Nepal, energy security, food security, water security, human security and stronger national economic structure and diversified and unfettered access to the sea and the global markets are critical. Likewise, democracy, human rights and social transformation enhance our inner strength and contribute to promoting stability within and outside. They need to be consolidated based on global norms and best practices. It is important to underscore that for Nepal, all the three sectors are mutually reinforcing and they need to be coherently promoted.

Main Pillars of Nepal's Foreign Policy

Under the country or region-specific approach, we can envisage five key pillars of our foreign policy. The first pillar is our relationship with India, which has long historical roots and cuts across all sectors from political, economic, commercial, people-to-people relations and culture to religion. Now with the second innings of the Modi Government, we should be able to capitalize on the strong national leadership of India to promote our larger interests with acumen, constant communications and clarity. Economic relationship needs to be transformed to enhance our productive capacity and better trade, transit and investment deals. Connectivity and especially the energy trade would be critical in the days ahead. The unfinished business of the border demarcation, project completion and EPG report should get due priority. We have not been able to make the best use of its neighbourhood first policy, its rising economic power and upsurge in global footprint.

The second pillar is our relationship with China, which is also historical and has many political, economic, developmental and cultural dimensions. While political visits, trade and investment relationship are growing, we have yet to make full use of the ascendant Chinese economic clout for changing the structure of the economy for the long term benefit of the country. BRI should be utilized in a way that it would consolidate our independence, enhance our opportunities and help fulfill our aspirations.

The third pillar is our long standing and diverse relationships with the developed (OECD) countries. They are important partners in progress as well. It was because of their contributions over the decades that we were able to make progress in human development. Furthermore, our diversification of relations with these countries help consolidate our independent foreign policy and enhance opportunities beyond the region. Therefore, there should be a conscious policy of enhancing their engagement, while keeping in view our longer term interests and the need for diversification. We have to be also cognizant that the external resources, trade and investment capacity of these countries are enormous, so are the political and strategic influence globally. Therefore, we should examine the Indo-Pacific strategy in a larger context and see to it that we get due benefit from it in the areas of our common interests, consistent with our aspirations and foreign policy objectives.

The fourth pillar is our relationship with countries providing foreign employment for the Nepalese people and all the others having other potentials of bilateral relationship including trade and investment. This relationship is now critically important as we have become heavily dependent on remittances, with almost 30 per cent of GDP, for our economic activities. While we should use the remittances to transform our economy, we seem to have fallen in the trap of enjoying it only without substantially changing our economic structure with such important foreign exchange resources. Consumption-oriented, import-led and remittance-dependent economy is not a very healthy sign for an economy with sizeable population like Nepal. We should promote a circular migration with choice and have strong youth employment policy in the country.

And the final pillar is UN and international development and financial institutions and regional organizations such as SAARC and BIMSTEC. Their principles, objectives and norms as well as their investment are of critical importance to us. These institutions embody fundamental principles of interstate relations and global and regional cooperation, reinforce sovereign equality and have collaborated with Nepal in all sectors from conflict resolution to promotion of human development, institution and infrastructure building, connectivity and economic cooperation, for a long time. They are going through either marginalization or outright hostility. It is in the fundamental interest of Nepal that we should continue to raise voice together with others to promote rule-based, fair and equitable global order with multilateralism at its core.

These relationships explained as five pillars are all important and they need to be nurtured in a balanced manner. We need to strengthen our multifaceted relationship with them, with in-depth study on their strengths and constraints, competitive and collaborative nature of their inter-relationships and the dynamic influence they exert on each other, and the way they impact on us and our activities. Major challenge for us has been lack of consolidation of all these relationships with a long-term view.

They may look at times mutually exclusive, we have to make them mutually supportive, with right policies and regular interactions. With constant engagements and consistent articulation of our thoughts and policies with all the five key pillars, we should be able to lift our relationships to a new height. Good relationship with immediate neighborhood is critical, but equally important is the diversification of relations with the wider world for mutual benefit and enlargement of our interests and options.

The best way to do that is by attaching due importance to all these relationships. In promoting our relationships, we should take cognizance of the fact that what we see depends on where we stand. Similarly, we should try to understand how others see us and we need to have both a bird's eye view and a worm's eye view for better understanding of our relationships.

In the similar vein, short-term actions and long term interests need to be analyzed, whether they are converging or diverging. A dynamic, holistic and integrated analysis is necessary, keeping longer-term and comprehensive national interests uppermost in our mind.

The Way Forward

We all know that foreign policy is an extension of the national policy abroad. More than that, today the traditional dividing lines are fast disappearing. It is hard to find out internal issues that are not affected by external actors or actions. This is true not only for Nepal, but for every country, including the major powers. But there is a difference. The major powers have instruments and components of power to blunt the impacts, if they are adverse in nature, or possess means to have a kind of trade off. We have limited means to do so. Therefore, we need to be more articulate and understand better which way the world is going and how we can better protect and promote our interests.

There is more to be gained, depending on how and whether we are able to use new levers of power such as technology, given the sweeping nature of impacts of globalization and technological revolutions. We have to figure out what instruments need to be taken into account and strengthened to ensure that we have a relative freedom to decide on choices in regard to our policies and amplify benefits to our people. In an interconnected world with cut-throat competition, we have to be constantly vigilant, but also prescient in making full use of all the opportunities. There is no alternative to ensuring consistency in our activities, bringing coherence in our policies, ensuring a longer term outlook in our approach and building up trust and confidence within and outside. They are all critical to our stability and long term prosperity.

Business as usual is not an option. As we take pride in an independent history, as we are in a strategic location with our inherent constraints but also some great potentials, and as the world order is going through a long term transition towards fundamental transformation, it is essential that we look at the issues from a strategic perspective in a holistic manner with a long term vision.

There is an acute need for a forward looking and dynamic analysis of all facets of our foreign relations on a continuous basis. Equally important issues before us are stronger and coherent institutional arrangements at all levels, formulation of policy options with wider consultations, and their effective and coordinated implementation, cooperative and inclusive multi-stakeholder approach, and continuous monitoring and follow up on the direction and results. This way we will have a dynamic and effective conduct and implementation of Nepal's foreign policy.

बाह्रखम्बा, तेह चक्कर



हरिकुमार श्रेष्ठ

परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयमा मेरा सुरुआती वर्षहरू दक्षिण एसिया महाशाखामा व्यतित भए पनि के तारतम्य नमिलेर हो पोष्टिडचाहिँ छिमेकी मुलुकहरूमा भएन । तर सुखद संयोग- समयको अन्तरालमा मैले हाम्रो छिमेकी मित्र राष्ट्र बङ्गलादेशमा नेपालको राजदूतको रूपमा सेवा गर्ने अवसर पाएँ । त्यस्तै, जसरी मेरो कूटनीतिक जीवनको सुरुवात दक्षिण एसिया महाशाखाबाट भएको थियो, त्यही महाशाखाको प्रमुखको हैसियतमा मैले परराष्ट्र सेवाबाट बिट मारें ।

सन् २००९ देखि २०११ सम्म दक्षिण एसिया तथा सार्क महाशाखाको प्रमुख रही कार्यरत छँदा द्विपक्षीय तथा सार्कको बैठकमा भाग लिन धेरैपटक नयाँ दिल्ली गइरहनु पर्दथ्यो । एक हिसाबले मेरा लागि दिल्ली पानीपँधरो जस्तै भएको थियो । त्यस बेलादेखि नयाँ दिल्लीको मुटुमा रहेको बाह्रखम्बा रोडस्थित नेपाली दूतावाससँग नजिकिएको हुँ । दूतावासमा पोष्टिड नभए तापनि त्यहाँको भूगोल, दूतावासको काम गर्ने तौरतरिका र उसले झेलेका समस्यालाई नजिकैबाट नियाल्ने मौका पाएको थिएँ । त्यसदेखि बाहेक दूतावासको गेष्टरुमलाई आफ्नै घरको सुत्ने कोठा सम्झेर कैयन रात बिताएको पनि छु । प्रस्तुत लेखमा मैले त्यहाँ बिताएका केही यादगार क्षणहरू तथा अन्य केही सन्दर्भहरू पस्कदै छु ।

सन् २०११ को कुरा हो- परराष्ट्रमन्त्री सुजाता कोइरालासँग नयाँ दिल्ली जानु परेको थियो । विवेकानन्द फाउण्डेसनले ६ र ७ जनवरीमा नयाँ दिल्लीमा आयोजना गरेको एउटा सम्मेलनमा उनलाई प्रमुख अतिथिको रूपमा आमन्त्रण गरेको थियो । त्यस कार्यक्रममा नेपालबाट जानेमानेका राजनीतिज्ञ र गिनेचुनेका बुद्धिजीवी र विज्ञहरूको ठूलो समूहले भाग लिएको थियो ।

आयोजकले मन्त्री महोदयालाई नयाँ दिल्लीको साङ्ग्राला होटलमा बस्ने प्रबन्ध मिलाएका थिए । साथमा जाने अधिकृतका विषयमा भने केही बोलेका थिएनन् । मलाई झनै आनन्द । सीधै आफ्नै दूतावासमा झोला फ्याल्ने सुरमा थिएँ । मेरो सजिलोको लागि परराष्ट्रसचिव मदनकुमार भट्टराईले दूतावासका उपनियोगप्रमुख खगनाथ अधिकारीलाई मेरैअगाडि फोन गरे:

“परराष्ट्र मन्त्रीज्यू साङ्ग्रालामा बस्नुहुन्छ । हरिकुमारजी चाहिँ भाङ्ग्रालामा । ”

परराष्ट्रसचिवले अनुप्रास मिलाउन त्यसो भनेका थिए । दूतावासको गेष्टरुमको अवमूल्यन वा त्यसप्रति हेयभाव उनको भनाइमा किञ्चित् मात्र पनि थिएन । उनी स्वयम् दिल्लीमा दुई दुई पटक पोष्टिड भइसकेकोले दूतावास र त्यहाको गेष्टरुमबारे पनि भुक्तभोगी थिए । गेष्टरुममा कुन बेला कसले धावा बोल्ने हो थाहा हुन्थेन ।

तर भारतीय विदेश मन्त्रालयले के मान्थ्यो ? मलाई पनि साङ्ग्रलामा तानिहाले । तर दूतावासमा बस्दाजस्तो स्वतन्त्रता साङ्ग्रलामा के होस् ?

प्रमुख अतिथिको लिखित मन्तव्य पढेपछि मन्त्री महोदयाको औपचारिक कार्यक्रम सकियो । त्यसपछि उनको एक दुई राजनीतिक भेटघाट थिए, जसमा म पनि सामेल भएको थिएँ । तीमध्ये प्रणव मुखर्जी र नितिन गडकरीसँग भएका उनका भेटघाटहरू मेरो सम्झनामा अझै ताजा छन् ।

प्रणव मुखर्जी त्यतिखेर अर्थमन्त्री थिए । उनी मनमोहन सिंह सरकारको वरिष्ठतम् र सबभन्दा प्रभावशाली मन्त्री मानिन्थे । पहिले विदेशमन्त्रीसमेत भैसकेकाले उनी नेपाल मामिलामा जानकार मात्र थिएनन्, उत्तिकै रुचि पनि राख्थे । उनीसँग भेटघाटको समय रातको डिनरपछि उनकै कार्यकक्ष नर्थ ब्लकमा तय भएको थियो । हामी उनलाई भेट्न जाँदा रातको दश बजिसकेको हुँदो हो । उनी टेबुलभरि फाइलका चाडले घेरिएर बसेका थिए । उनले नै कुरा उठाए:

“हेर्नुस् न, दिनभरी मिटिङ, राजनीतिक भेट, यताउति गर्दैमा मन्त्रालयको जरुरी कामसमेत गर्ने फर्सद हुँदैन । मैले काम गर्ने भनेकै डिनरपछि रातको शान्त समयमा हो ।”

भेटवार्ता सकिएपछि उनको कार्यकक्षबाट बाहिरिँदा उनका सचिवले थपे:

“उहाँ रातको बाह्र बजेसम्म अफिसमा नै हो । उहाँ नगई हामी पनि जाने कुरा भएन ।”

पहिलो पुस्ताका भारतीय नेताहरू कतिसम्म मिहेनती र लगनशील हुँदारहेछन् भन्ने त्यो सानो उदाहरण मात्रै थियो । तिनै मसिनो स्वरमा कुरा गर्ने, होचो कदका, मृदुभाषी नेता र नेपालका हितैषी मित्र राष्ट्रपति श्री प्रणव मुखर्जीको ३१ अगष्ट २०२० मा भएको निधनले नेपालले एक शुभेच्छुक गुमाएको छ ।

अर्को भेटघाट थियो नितिन गडकरीसँग । भेटघाटका लागि उनले आफ्नै निवासमा निम्त्याएका थिए । त्यतिखेर उनी भारतीय जनता पार्टी (बीजेपी) का अध्यक्ष थिए । बीजेपी दुई पटक लोकसभाको निर्वाचनमा पराजित भई कमजोर प्रतिपक्षको भूमिकामा थियो । बीजेपीलाई भारतको केन्द्रीय राजनीतिमा पुर्नस्थापित गर्ने अहम् कार्यमा ती युवा नेता लागिपरेका थिए ।

उनको निवासमा छिर्दा निजी आवासजस्तो लाग्थेन । नेता, कार्यकर्ताको भीड छल्दै हामी उनको सामान्य बैठक कोठामा पुग्यौँ । उनले न्यानो हार्दिकता देखाउँदै भने:

“हेर्नुस् न, मेरोमा बिहानदेखि बेलुकासम्म सधैं यस्तै हो ।”

त्यस्तो व्यस्तताबीच पनि उनको कुराकानीमा दूरदर्शी राजनीतिक चेतनाको आभाष स्पष्ट झल्किन्थ्यो । उनी भन्थे:

“भारतका ठुला औद्योगिक र व्यापारिक शहरलाई बृहत् सडक सञ्जालले नजोडेसम्म हामी विकसित मुलुकको दाँजोमा पुग्न सक्दैनौँ ।”

उनको बनाइ कोलकातादेखि चेन्नाइ, बैङ्गलुरुदेखि हैदरावाद अनि मुम्बइदेखि दिल्लीलाई वृहत् सडक सञ्जालले जोड्नुपर्छ भन्ने थियो । भेटघाट सकिएपछि उनले भारतीय लेखक तुहिन सिन्हासँगको सहलेखनमा हालै प्रकाशित 'India Aspires' नामक पुस्तक मन्त्री महोदयालाई थमाउन भ्याए ।

उनको सादापन र दृढ निश्चयी व्यक्तित्वका कारण कुनै बेला यिनी केन्द्रीयस्तरको नेताको रूपमा चिनिने छन् जस्तो मलाई त्यतिखेरै लागेको थियो । नभन्दै उनी अहिले भारतको केन्द्रीय सरकारमा सार्वजनिक यातायात मन्त्रालयको जिम्मेवारी बोकेर बसेका छन् ।

त्यसरी धेरैपटक दिल्ली जाँदा साउथ ब्लकको पाहुना भएको बेला होटलमा र अरू बेला आफ्नै दूतावासको गेष्टरुममा बस्थे । त्यहाँ बस्दा दूतावासका साथीभाइहरूसँग गफसफ गर्न पनि पाइँने, अनि नजिकैको बङ्गाली मार्केटमा तात्तातो जिलेबी पुरी, छोलेभटुरे, दहिवाडाको स्वाद पनि लिन पाइने । त्यसैले कहिलेकाहीं भारतीय विदेश मन्त्रालयको आतिथ्य छाडेर म दूतावासतिर सोझिन्थे । आफ्नो घर भनेको आफ्नै हो ।

दूतावासको गेष्टरुममा बस्दा मसँग धेरै यादगार अनुभवहरू छन् । म बङ्गलादेशमा कार्यरत रहँदाको कुरा हो, हामी एक हप्ताको विदामा ढाकाबाट “मैत्री एक्सप्रेस” चढेर कोलकाता, त्यसपछि “राजधानी एक्सप्रेस” को आरामदायी रेलयात्राबाट दिल्ली घुम्न गएका थियौं । त्यतिखेर पनि दूतावासको गेष्टरुममा बस्ने सौजन्य प्राप्त भएको थियो । राजदूत नभएकाले दूतावासमा पाहुनाको लर्को अलि होलो नै थियो । त्यसैले हामीलाई दूतावासको भी.आई.पी. गेष्टरुममा बस्ने मौका मिलेको थियो । हामी भाग्यमानी नै रहेछौं नत्र विभिन्न बहानामा नेपालबाट आउने सांसद, मन्त्री, नेता, कार्यकर्ताको लहर कहिल्यै छुट्थेन ।

पाहुना पाल्दा पाल्दा दूतावास पनि हैरान भैसकेको थियो । कस्तासम्म पाहुना लाग्थे भने बाथरुमको रुमाल, चप्पलसमेत गायब पार्थे । कति नयाँ फेरिरहने ? गेष्टरुममा सुन्न मात्र दिएर पुग्थेन । ब्रेकफाष्ट, डिनर, गाडीको पनि आशा गर्थे- अतिथिजन । कतिलाई मात्र खुवाउने ? कहिलेसम्म पाल्ने ? दूतावास आजित भैसकेको थियो । त्यसैले गेष्टरुममा धावा बोल्ने पाहुनालाई दूतावासले यस्तो फर्मान जारी गरेको थियो:

“दूतावासको गेष्टरुममा यहाँलाई स्वागत छ । चियाको लागि टेबुलमा टी ब्याग, चिनी र इलेक्ट्रिक कित्लीको व्यवस्था छ । नास्ता र खानाको लागि नजिकैको बङ्गाली मार्केटमा सुविधा छ । कृपया जाने बेलामा कोठाको साँचो बुझाएर जान नभुल्नु होला । यहाँको दिल्ली बसाइ सुखद रहोस् ।”

त्यो फर्मान पढ्दैगर्दा मैले केही वर्षअघि हेरेको हिन्दी चलचित्र “अतिथि तुम कब जाओगे”को दृश्य जस्ताको तस्तै आँखाअगाडि आयो । अतिथि हुनलाई कुनै तिथि चाहिँदो रहेनछ र तिनले कतिसम्म बेथिति निम्त्याउँदा रहेछन् भन्ने जान्नलाई दिल्लीस्थित नेपाली दूतावासको गेष्टरुममा एक रात बिताएपछि छर्लङ्ग हुन्छ ।

कालान्तरमा दूतावासको त्यही “भाङ्गला गेष्टरुम” मेरा लागि साङ्गलाभन्दा विलासिताको चीज हुन पुग्यो । पछिल्लो पटक सन् २०१९ को नोभेम्बरमा केही रात मैले दूतावासको गेष्टरुममा बिताउने मौका पाएँ । नियमित स्वास्थ्य परीक्षणको सिलसिलामा छोटो समयका लागि दिल्ली गएको थिएँ । परराष्ट्रसँगको साइनोका कारण दूतावासका साथीभाइले नाइँनास्ति गरेनन्, बरु सहयोग नै गरे ।

त्यसो त म त्यति डिमान्डिड मान्छे पनि होइन । सकभर अरूलाई घच्च दिन मनले मान्दैन । दूतावासको गेष्टरुममा बस्दा त्यहाँको प्रोटोकलको राम्रो ज्ञान थियो । गाडी खाली भएको बेला अस्पताल जान मोटर चाहिन्छ कि भनेर साथीभाइले सदासयता देखाउँथे । तर दिल्लीमा घुम्न मेट्रोजति भरपर्दो र आरामदायी साधन मलाई अर्को केही लागेन । दूतावासनजिकको मण्डी हाउस मेट्रो स्टेसनमा छिरेपछि जता जान पनि सजिलो । ट्राफिक जाम पनि नहुने, भतभती गर्मीले पनि नपोल्ने । त्यस्तै दूतावास आउन पनि “एयरपोर्ट एक्सप्रेस” ट्रेन समातेपछि आधा घण्टामा कनाट प्लेसको शिवाजी स्टेडियममा आइपुगिहाल्थ्यो । त्यहाँबाट अटोले पाँच मिनेटमा नै बाह्रखम्बा रोडस्थित नेपाली दूतावासको गेटमा ओराल्थ्यो । त्योभन्दा सुविधायुक्त ट्रान्जिट दिल्लीमा अरू कुनै लागेन ।

त्यसो त, लण्डन बस्दा होस् वा मलेसिया- एयरपोर्ट जानु परे म सकभर “एयरपोर्ट एक्सप्रेस” नै रोज्थेँ । क्वालालम्पुर एयरपोर्ट त शहरबाट ८० किलोमिटर टाढा छ । ट्राफिक नभएको बेला रफ्तारले गाडी हुइँक्याउँदा पनि एक-डेढ घण्टा लागिहाल्छ । तर के.एल. सेन्ट्रलबाट एयरपोर्ट एक्सप्रेस ट्रेन समातेपछि आधा घण्टामा सीधै विमानस्थल पुगिन्छ । त्यस्तै लण्डनको हिथ्रो एक्सप्रेसले पनि प्याडिडटन रेल स्टेशनबाट आधा घण्टामा सीधै हिथ्रो विमानस्थल पुर्याउँछ ।

म पछिल्लो पटक नयाँ दिल्लीको नेपाली दूतावास छिर्दा त्यहाँ मैले नसोचेको प्रगति देख्न पाएँ । दूतावासको प्रवेशद्वारको सुरक्षा निकै कडा पारिएको रहेछ । दूतावास परिसरमा कूटनैतिक कर्मचारीका लागि लस्करै प्रि-फ्याव आवास भवन बनेछन्, केही बन्दै रहेछन् । दूतावासको अतिथिकक्षको पनि ग्रेडिड भएछ । भी.आई.पी. गेष्टरुमलाई “कोशी” र मध्यमस्तरीय गेष्टरुमको नाम “गण्डकी” दिइएको रहेछ । मलाई “गण्डकी”मा बस्ने व्यवस्था मिलाइएको रहेछ ।

“कोशी” गेष्टरुममा मैले चिनेजानेकै अतिथि रहिछिन्- रागिनी उपाध्याय । उनी बी.पी. कोइराला नेपाल-भारत फाउण्डेसनको बोर्ड मिटिङमा भाग लिई एक रातका लागि दूतावास बसेकी रहिछिन् । संजोग कस्तो भने म दक्षिण एसिया महाशाखा प्रमुख भएको बेला सन् २०११ मा भारतको गोवामा आयोजित फाउण्डेसनको बोर्ड मिटिङमा भाग लिन हामी काठमाडौँबाट सँगै गएका थियौँ । त्यो प्रसङ्ग जोडेपछि हाम्रो चिनाजानी नवीकरण भइहाल्यो ।

गोवा बोर्ड मिटिङको सानो रोचक प्रसङ्ग यतिखेर सम्झँदैछु । बैठकको सह-अध्यक्षता दिल्लीस्थित नेपाली राजदूत र काठमाडौँस्थित भारतीय राजदूतले गर्ने प्रावधान छ । भारतीय विदेश मन्त्रालयका नेपाल विभाग हेर्ने सहसचिव र हाम्रो परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयको दक्षिण एसिया महाशाखाको सहसचिव पदेन सदस्य रहने प्रावधान भएकोले त्यो बैठकमा मैले भाग लिन पाएको थिएँ । त्यतिखेर दिल्लीमा नेपाली राजदूत रुक्म शमशेर राणा थिए, काठमाडौँमा भारतीय राजदूत राकेश सूद । बैठक औपचारिक घेराको बन्धनमा बाँधिएको हुन्थेन । खुल्ला रूपमा छलफल गरी निर्णय लिने बोर्डको परम्परा थियो । दुई अध्यक्षले संक्षिप्त मन्तव्य राखेपछि विस्तृत एजेण्डामा छलफल गर्न हामीलाई जिम्मा दिई उनीहरू सपत्नी समुद्री किनारतिर घुम्न गए ।

एजेण्डामा प्रवेश गरेपछि भने मैले कता कता असजिलो महसुस गरें । काठमाडौँस्थित भारतीय दूतावासमा फाउण्डेसनको व्ययभार हुने गरी प्राप्त कतिपय आवेदन र प्रस्तावहरूको फाउण्डेसनसँग गोरू बेचेको साइनो पनि थिएन । नेपालका कतिपय स्वनामधन्य व्यक्ति वा संस्थाले दुईचार लाखको लोभमा तुक न ताकका प्रस्ताव पेस गरेको देख्दा कता कता आत्मग्लानी महसुस हुन्थ्यो । त्यस्ता आवेदन वा प्रस्तावमाथि छलफल हुनुपूर्व मैले मेरा भारतीय समकक्षीलाई प्रस्ताव गर्दै भनैँ :

“यसरी एक एक वटा प्रस्तावमा रौँचिरा छलफल गरे हाम्रो मिटिङ मध्यरातमा पनि सकिँदैन । पहिला त ती प्रस्तावहरू फाउण्डेसनको उद्देश्य र मर्मसम्मत छन् कि छैनन्, त्यो हेर्नुपर्‍यो । त्यसैमा उभिएर हामी एउटा मापदण्ड बनाऔँ, अनि खुरुखुरु अघि बढ्न सजिलो हुन्छ ।”

उनलाई पनि त्यो प्रस्ताव जँच्यो र फाउण्डेसनको भावना र मर्मबाट अभिप्रेरित प्रस्तावलाई मात्र कार्यक्रममा समावेश गर्ने सहमति जुटेपछि करिब डेढ सय प्रस्तावमध्ये आधाआधी त पहिलो राउण्डमा नै गोडिए । बाँकीलाई अन्तिम रूप दिन हामीलाई धेरै समय खर्चिनु परेन । आफ्नो भनाई तर्कसङ्गत रूपमा राख्न सके काम आउँदोरहेछ भन्ने यो सानो उदाहरण मात्र ।

भोलिपल्ट बिहानको सिसिरि हावामा हामी समुद्री किनारमा घुम्दै थियौँ, त्यसबेला मेरो मनमा के आयो कुन्नि ? मैले आफ्नो भारतीय समकक्षीसँग यस्तो सानो प्रस्ताव राखें:

“अहिले हाम्रो परराष्ट्र सेवामा पहिलो पटक एकैपटक २८ जनाको ठूलो व्याचले प्रवेश पाएका छन् । ती नवप्रवेशीहरूलाई उपयुक्त तालिमको अवसरको लागि मन्त्रालय प्रयासरत छ । भारतको वैदेशिक सेवा तालिम प्रतिष्ठानको गुणस्तरबारे हामी जानकार छौँ । त्यो प्रतिष्ठानको तालिममा हाम्रा पनि केही सहभागीलाई सम्मिलित गर्न सकिएला?”

मलाई त्यो विचार अकस्मात् आएर भनेको थिइँन । त्यसको केही महिनाअघि मात्र त्यही प्रतिष्ठानमा तालिम लिइरहेका भारतीय वैदेशिक सेवाका नवप्रवेशीको समूह एक हप्ताको लागि नेपालको अध्ययन भ्रमणमा आएको थियो । त्यसबेला उनीहरूले प्रधानमन्त्री तथा परराष्ट्रमन्त्रीसँग शिष्टाचार भेट गर्नको साथै गृह, अर्थ र रक्षा मन्त्रालयका पदाधिकारीहरूसँग भेटघाट गरी नेपाल-भारत सम्बन्धको विभिन्न आयामबारे विहङ्गम जानकारी प्राप्त गरेका थिए ।

एउटा पुरा सेसन त परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयमै राखिएको थियो जसको संयोजनको जिम्मा मैले पाएको थिएँ । त्यसबेला हाम्रा नवप्रवेशी अधिकृतहरूले आफ्ना समकक्षी भारतीय प्रशिक्षार्थिसँग अनौपचारिक छलफल गर्न पाएका थिए । मलाई त्यतिखेरै मनमा गढेको थियो- हाम्रा अफिसरहरूले पनि त्यस्तै तालिम, एक्सपोजर पाउँदा हुन् त उनीहरूको कार्यदक्षता, आत्मविश्वास र वृत्ति विकास पनि सोहीअनुरूप हुने थियो होला । त्यसैले उनीसँग मैले मनको कुरा गरेको थिएँ ।

उनले त्यसलाई सकारात्मक रूपमा नै लिएर भने:

“म हाम्रा एकेडेमीको निर्देशकसँग कुरा गरेर मात्र तिम्रो प्रस्तावको विषयमा जवाफ दिन सकौंला ।”

नभन्दै उनले एकेडेमीको निर्देशकसँग कुरा गरेछन् । मन्त्रालयमा पनि आन्तरिक छलफल भयो होला । नेपाल अध्ययन भ्रमणमा आएको नवप्रवेशी प्रशिक्षार्थीको पनि राम्रै फिडब्याक रहेछ ।

त्यसको केही समयपछि एउटा अर्को मिटिङको सिलसिलामा दिल्ली जाँदा उनीसँग त्यस विषयमा पनि अनौपचारिक छलफल भयो । उनले यसो भने:

“अहिले हाम्रो एकेडेमीमा नवप्रवेशी ब्याचको तालिम अन्तिम चरणमा छ । त्यसमा सामेल गर्न व्यावहारिक र एकेडेमिक दुवै हिसावले सम्भव छैन । त्यो ब्याचको तालिम सकिएपछि एकेडेमीको तीन महिनाको क्यालेण्डर खाली छ । बरु त्यसमा तपाईंका प्रशिक्षार्थीहरूका लागि हामी तीनमहिने छुट्टै तालिम आयोजना गर्न सक्छौं । यसमा सकारात्मक सोच आए सायद हामी अघि बढ्न सक्छौं कि?”

मैले उनलाई तत्काल प्रतिक्रिया जनाउने अवस्था थिएन । काठमाडौं फर्केपछि छिट्टै खबर गरौंला भनी बिदाबारी भएँ । मन्त्रालयमा मैले त्यही कुरा परराष्ट्रसचिवलाई अवगत गराएँ । उनीपनि सकारात्मक देखिए र भने:

“खासा गर्नुभएछ ।”

मन्त्रालयमा त्यो “खासा” शब्द द्विअर्थीको रूपमा हामीबीच धेरै समयदेखि परिचित थियो । कतै सचिवले त्यस अर्थमा त लिएनन् भन्ने पनि लाग्यो, तर होइन रहेछ ।

“राम्रो विचार हो । केटाकेटीहरूलाई उचित तालिमको लागि हामीले अवसर र सम्भावनाको खोजी गर्ने पर्छ- भारत, पाकिस्तान, बङ्गलादेश, चीन, जापान जहाँ सम्भव छ ।” उनको भनाइले म आश्चर्य भएँ ।

त्यसको केही समयपछि भारतीय राजदूत राकेश सुद परराष्ट्रसचिवलाई भेट्न मन्त्रालय आएको बखत त्यो प्रसङ्ग पनि उठ्यो । त्यो वार्तामा म पनि थिएँ । राजदूतले के पनि थपे भने तालिमको लागि कोर्ष डिजाइन, मोड्यूल, तालिम अवधि आदिबारे हामी बसेर छलफल गरौँ । प्रशिक्षार्थीको साथमा आवश्यक संयोजनको लागि मन्त्रालयबाट एकजना वरिष्ठ अधिकृत पनि समावेश गर्न सकिन्छ ।

उनको सदासयतामा शङ्का गर्ने ठाउँ थिएन । परराष्ट्रसचिवले सो विषयमा सैद्धान्तिक सहमति जनाउँदै छिट्टै निर्णय हुने बताएर राजदूतलाई बिदाबारी गरे । त्यो वार्ताबाट म उत्साहित भएँ ।

अब भारत सरकारलाई औपचारिक पत्र पठाउन मात्र बाँकी थियो । त्यसैबीच सचिवले मलाई आफ्नो कार्यक्षमा बोलाएर भने :

“नोट पठाउनुअघि एक पटक परराष्ट्रमन्त्रीज्यूलाई सोध्ने कि”?

सचिवले मन्त्रीलाई सोधे, मन्त्रीले प्रधानमन्त्रीलाई । त्यसबीच उक्त प्रस्तावको राम्रै राजनीतिकरण भयो । ठूलो मिडिया प्रचारबाजी पनि भयो; अन्ततः त्यो प्रस्ताव त्यसै भाँडियो । मलाई नमज्जाको अनुभूति भयो ।

वैदेशिक सेवामा नवप्रवेशीले भारतमा तालिम लिनु हुन्न भन्ने कुन सिद्धान्त र व्यवहारले भन्छ, मैले बुझ्न सकेको थिइनँ । नेपाली सेनाका सयौँ अधिकृतले त्यहाँका विभिन्न सैनिक प्रतिष्ठानबाट तालिम लिएकै छन् । देहरादून र पुनेको सैनिक एकेडेमीदेखि लिएर नेशनल डिफेन्स कलेज कोर्ष गर्ने थुप्रै अफिसर नेपाली सेनाको उच्च तहमा पुगेका छन् । नेपाल प्रहरी र शसस्त्र प्रहरीले पनि विभिन्न तालिम, कोर्षका लागि आफ्ना अफिसरलाई भारतमा नियमित रूपमा पठाउँदै आएका छन् । निजामतीतर्फ त सङ्ख्या गनेर साध्य नै छैन । कोलम्बो प्लानअन्तर्गत हजारौँको सङ्ख्यामा भारतमा अध्ययन गरेका डाक्टर, इन्जिनियर, कृषि वैज्ञानिक, सर्भेयर, फरेष्टर, कानूनविद्, अर्थविद्, योजनाविद् आदिले आ-आफ्ना क्षेत्रमा विशिष्ट योगदान पुर्याएका छन् । तर के उनीहरू सबै भारत परस्त भए त ?

त्यति सामान्य ज्ञान पनि नबुझी वा भनौँ बुझपचाई र त्यसभन्दा पनि अधिक राजनीतिकरण र नचाहिंदो मिडियाबाजीको कारण विशुद्ध पेशागत ज्ञान र सीप अभिवृद्धिको लागि हामीले अघि सारेको त्यो सानो प्रयास बीचैमा तुहियो । अहिले नेपालमा भइरहेको एम.सी.सी.को बहस पनि उस्तै हो । जेमा पनि अधिक राजनीतिकरण गर्ने, मिडियाबाजी गर्ने, अर्थहीन वादविवाद, घोचपेच, दाउपेचमा समय बर्बाद गर्ने त अहिले हाम्रो राष्ट्रिय चरित्र नै भएको छ । त्यसले मुलुकलाई पक्कै भलो गर्दैन ।

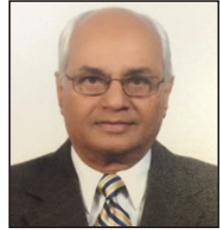
त्यो तालिम प्रकरण बीचैमा तुहिएकोमा भारतीय विदेश मन्त्रालयका नेपाल हेर्ने पदाधिकारीहरूले अवश्यै ननिको माने होलान् । प्रकटमा भने त्यस्तो कुनै झलक दिएनन् । उल्टै सूक्ष्म कूटनीतिको माध्यमबाट हामीलाई ठूलो गुन लाए जुन त्यो छोटो तालिम भन्दा कैयौँ गुणा महत्त्व राख्ने खालको थियो ।

तालिम प्रकरणको केही समयपछि भारतीय राजदूतले परराष्ट्रसचिवलाई भेट्दा त्यस्तै अर्को प्रस्ताव प्रस्तुत गरे । दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालयमा कानूनको स्नातकोत्तर एल.एल.एल.का लागि भारत सरकारले नेपाललाई एकमुष्ट सातवटा सिट उपलब्ध गराउने प्रस्ताव लिई उनी आएका थिए । तर उम्मेदवारको छनौट बढीमा दुई हप्तामा नै भइसक्नुपर्ने थियो, किनकि विश्वविद्यालयमा विद्यार्थी भर्नाको अन्तिम मिति नजिकिँदै थियो । हाम्रो लम्बे सरकारी प्रक्रिया - योजना आयोग, सामान्य प्रशासन मन्त्रालय, अर्थ मन्त्रालय हुँदै “काशी जाने कुतीको बाटो”को उम्मेदवार छनौट प्रक्रियाका कारण त्यो असम्भवप्रायः थियो भन्ने सचिवले राम्रै बुझेका थिए, मलाई पनि त्यसको ज्ञान थियो । तर त्यस मामिलामा परराष्ट्रसचिव मदन भट्टराईले अलि जोखिम नै उठाए । सबै प्रक्रियालाई पाखा लगाई उनले कानून सचिव, सह-महान्यायाधिवक्ता, सर्वोच्च अदालतका रजिष्ट्रार आदिलाई फोन नै गरेर एक हप्ताभित्रै काम तमाम गर्न सफल भए । अन्ततः उक्त सीट सङ्ख्या सातबाट बढेर दश हुन पुग्यो जुन हामीले पूर्णरूपमा उपयोग गर्न सफल भयौं ।

त्यो सूक्ष्म कूटनीति बाहिर आएन । तर नतिजा भने देशले दश जना अब्बल दर्जाका कानूनविद् पायो । के उनीहरू सबै भारतपरस्त भए त?

पछिल्लोपटक अवकाशपछिको फुसर्दिलो दिनमा दूतावासको गेष्टरुममा सुस्ताउँदा ती र अरू पनि कतिपय यादहरू पुनः ताजा हुन पुगे । अब त धेरैजसो धुमिल सम्झनामा मात्र छन् । परराष्ट्रमा पनि पुस्तान्तरण भइसक्यो । नयाँ पुस्ताले हामीलाई चिन्दैनन् पनि । स्वाभाविक छ, बाह्रखम्बा रोडको नेपाली दूतावासले पनि विस्तारै चिन्न छाड्नेछ । फेरि कुनै दिन दिल्ली गइएछ भने त्यहाँ मैले प्रवेश पाउन पनि सक्छु या नपाउन पनि । त्यसले तात्त्विक फरक पाउँदैन । मुख्य कुरा त भावनात्मक सम्बन्ध हो । त्यही भावनात्मक सम्बन्धको कारण दूतावासको गेष्टरुमलाई मैले “भाङ्गला” भन्नेसम्मको दृष्टता गर्न सकेको छु । त्यसमा कुनै हेयभाव नभई मेरो भित्री हृदय बोलेको हो । मेरो लागि दूतावासको गेष्टरुम कुनै “साङ्गला” भन्दा कम थिएन र कहिले पनि कम हुने छैन । किनकि त्यहाँ नेपालको आत्मा बसेको छ । ऐतिहासिक महत्त्वको त्यस दूतावास भवनले सम्पूर्ण नेपालीको मानप्रतिष्ठा र आत्मसम्मान जोगाउनका साथै नेपालको स्वतन्त्रता र सार्वभौमिकताको पनि पहरेदारी गरिरहेको छ । दूतावासको गरिमा बढे मात्र हाम्रो पनि गरिमा बढ्छ भन्ने कुरा हामीले कहिल्यै नभुलौं । त्यस्तै मुलुकको गरिमा बढे दूतावासको पनि प्रतिष्ठा बढ्छ भन्ने कुरा पनि नबिसौं ।

A Forward-looking Foreign Policy for Nepal



Kedar Bhakta Shrestha

Years ago, a highly placed person asked me “does Nepal have a foreign policy?” Years later, another prominent person made an identical query. I was somewhat intrigued and pondered myself as to the reason behind such dignitaries doubting about Nepal having a foreign policy. I had felt, on those occasions, that these queries were prompted by diverse and oftentimes, contradictory stances and positions taken by different parties and individuals on matters relating to our foreign relations.

In all fairness it must be said that Nepal has a clearly articulated foreign policy based on the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference in others’ internal affairs and peaceful co-existence. These basic tenets have now been further elaborated and enshrined in our constitution and serve as the guidelines for the formulation and implementation of our foreign policy. Our positions on many international issues ranging from colonization, apartheid, disarmament, human rights, non-alignment, regional cooperation, environment and matters relating to poverty and least developed countries have been and are being clearly articulated at appropriate occasions and are well appreciated.

Doubts and concerns about Nepal having a foreign policy are raised sometimes when differing and opposite views are expressed. Utterances by the leaders regarding Venezuela, as also on the Belt and Road Initiative and the Indo- Pacific Strategy (lately being modified and touted as a Concept or a Policy) lead to confusion both inside and outside the country. Such confusion is confounded when differing views are expressed by leaders of the party which runs the government.

The need for a national consensus regarding foreign policy can be hardly over emphasized. We can argue, discuss and debate about foreign policy but having done so, we should speak with one voice on vital matters therein. This will give both credence and strength to our policy. The present case of a united voice on the issue of Kalapani, Lipulek and Limpiyadhura can be cited as a good example of national consensus on foreign policy.

However, we should not shy away from posing the question- is our foreign policy tuned to or relevant in this fast changing world? Needless to say that our national interest should guide and determine our foreign policy. There may be slight variance in the focus of our policy or prioritization- sometimes taking a moderate and balanced stance while on other occasions, we may have to be more vocal and assertive, if need be.

Forward Looking Foreign Policy

In the context of a fast changing world scenario, there is a growing need to look at and analyze the evolving trends in the neighbourhood, region and beyond and adapt our policy in a manner that would enable us to protect and promote our national interests. While we will have to deal with day to day matters as per the established policy and practice as also to react to events as and when they occur and impact our interests, we should develop a system for a medium to long term strategic thinking and planning. What would be the world like say, in 2035, fifteen years from now? There are a number of studies portraying the world scenario around that period. Although there are varying degrees of forecast, many of their views converge at some of the major trends for the next fifteen years. I venture some observations.

Emerging Asia

One of the realities of the present day world is the growing economic prosperity of Asia, brought about mainly by China's economic reforms starting in 1978 and that of India's liberal economic policies that began around 1991.

The shift of wealth from US and Europe has become increasingly evident by the day. China has become the second economic power in the world and by the year 2035, its GDP would most likely have surpassed that of the United States. With growing economic prosperity and the resulting clout, there will be a desire to become militarily strong as well, as is evinced by the growing militarization in China. India also will continue to grow rich and by 2035 would have surpassed many nations including possibly Japan, to be in the 3rd place by that time. Indonesia, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore will help place Asia firmly on top of the world economic chart surpassing Europe. By 2035, Asia and USA will be the two major centers of world economy.

India - China

What would be India-China relations like in 2035? China, having established itself as an equal or near-equal economic power with the United States, will have become the pre-eminent power in Asia, both in economic and military terms. India would have greatly increased its GDP, significantly reducing its poverty and vastly increasing its industrial output. India may have been more populous than China. How would India-China relations evolve in the days to come? I have put them in four categories- cooperation, competition, confrontation and conflict.

Cooperation

India and China will cooperate in areas like trade, economic and environmental issues to the extent that their interests converge vis-a- vis the United States and the western world. Although India has many issues with US on trade matters, they have not captured the headlines like by the ongoing trade war between China and the US. In trade as well as other issues mentioned above, both the countries will find that it will be in their common interests to work together to extract concessions from the western world.

Competition

China will be more assertive in the region and beyond, sometimes even aggressive in its policies as can be seen in the case of South China Seas. It will increasingly consider only USA as its rival. Starting with its move to create a number of ports starting from China to Malacca, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Somalia and Sudan- dubbed as a “string of pearls”, it has come out with a much more ambitious and far-reaching Belt and Road Initiative which India has refused to be part of. Instead, it has opted to join the US sponsored Indo-Pacific Strategy. Also, India will continue to counter China’s move and strengthen its strategic goals by increasing its collaboration with Japan, Vietnam and Australia- the so called Quad Group- and also with the islands in the southern Indian Ocean like Seychelles, Mauritius and the Maldives. This is where they will compete.

Confrontation

The border dispute between India and China in Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh may not have been settled by 2035. There will be skirmishes on the disputed areas like the recent ones in Galwan valley, some other parts of Ladakh and Sikkim from time to time. That is what confrontation will mean.

Conflict

It is highly unlikely that India and China will engage in a full scale war over border issues. Occasional skirmishes and flexing of muscles are not likely to lead to conflict between the two countries. It will be in the interests of both the countries to “manage” the border dispute.

China and the United States

In 2035, China and the United States will be the two countries with the highest GDPs. Although China’s GDP would have equaled that of the USA, China’s per capita would be four times poorer due to the population factor. Still, China as a nation would be an economic power as great or even greater than the US. Its economy would have become more domestic consumption oriented, at the same time retaining its position as the

world's largest exporter. Its large investments around the globe would have given it a formidable economic clout. Renminbi might be competing with the US Dollar as the world's trading currency.

President Obama's "Pivot Asia" policy was a recognition by the US of the growing importance of Asia as an economic powerhouse. President Trump's aggressive pursuit of trade war with China is due to its fear of the increasing economic power of China. By 2035, China and the US would be the two major players competing to be dominant in the east, south and the south-east Asian region. The US will be engaged in further strengthening its ties with Japan, Korea, ASEAN, India and Australia to counter China's growing influence and aggressive gestures in the region.

China will continue to flex its muscles in and around east and South China Seas and along the disputed borders with India. To engage and maintain a healthy relationship with China will be the biggest challenge for American diplomacy in the years to come. Although it is hoped that sanity and common sense will prevent both sides from engaging into a disastrous relationship, they will remain as rivals in many areas. To "manage" their rivalry will test the diplomatic acumen of both the countries.

India's Look East Policy

India's Look East Policy is aimed at achieving a greater role for itself in the region and beyond as well as in countering growing Chinese influence and assertiveness. India will continue to enhance its defense diplomacy with Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia and possibly with Australia which would have more closely integrated itself economically with the region. By 2035, India would have established itself as a major player in the region in terms of trade and investment. Its military prowess would also have grown significantly although lagging way behind that of China. India's actions and policies will be aimed at containing China's growing economic and military prowess.

Nepal-India

By 2035, Nepal would have greatly diversified its trade and economic relations. On both these fronts, countries beside India would be playing a greater role. But it will be a mistake to minimize India's importance in Nepal's trade and economic relations. India will still continue to be a major investor in hydropower, services and manufacturing industries. Indian tourist arrivals would have significantly increased with growing air, road and rail connectivity. Many Indian and Nepalese cities will have direct air links. It would be much easier for vehicles from both countries to travel back and forth. It will be a common sight of Nepalese driving their own cars to Delhi, Lucknow, Varanasi, Haridwar, Siliguri and so on. Likewise Indian tourists will be seen driving their own cars in various Nepalese towns and touristic spots.

Nepal's relations with India are unique in many ways- open border and free movement of people, and close social, cultural and religious ties. Millions of Nepalese are engaged in employment in different parts of India as are hundreds of thousands of Indians in Nepal. In order to strengthen and consolidate our bilateral relations, we should leave behind the historical baggage and move forward with a fresh and open mind. If we have a clear and unambiguous national consensus in our dealings with India, there will be not much room to complain about interference and meddling in internal affairs.

Nepal-India-China

India and China would have become top world economic powers by 2035. The nature of their relations would vary from cooperative to confrontational as mentioned earlier. No matter how their relations develop, bilateral trade would be one area which will continue to grow. Situated between the two economic behemoths, Nepal should make the most of this enviable position. Nepal should adopt and pursue the policy of equiproximity wherever and whenever applicable. Nepal should be clear and unequivocal in convincing both the countries that its relations with one would not be detrimental to the other. In order to do so, Nepal should keep in mind the sensitivities of both the countries in mind. It will be a pity if Nepal remained in the sidelines unable to reap the benefits of being placed between these two powerful countries.

Regional Cooperation

It is sad to see SAARC immobilized at the moment due to the growing rivalry and hostile postures of two of its largest members. When and how will it come back to action is difficult to say. But it must be said that if SAARC is allowed to pursue its mandated goal of cooperation in the region, the region as a whole will stand to gain.

BIMSTEC has emerged as another vehicle for cooperation with an eastward slant. But how will it move forward in a cohesive manner is yet to be seen. Thailand is too much integrated with ASEAN to be too keen to be deeply involved with BIMSTEC. Myanmar, straddled as it is between ASEAN and South Asia will be ambivalent towards BIMSTEC.

The best scenario for Nepal would be the revival and strengthening of SAARC. Failing that or without waiting for that to happen, Nepal should develop closer links within the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) framework and take up joint projects of common interests in the field of trade, energy, investment, services and other economic activities. For that, there will be a need to develop infrastructure in the region to harness the potentialities of hydropower, transportation- rail, road and river- and other areas.

European Union

European Union will remain a powerhouse of economy in 2035 in spite of the troubled economies of the southern countries and the setback and confusion caused by Brexit. It will be in our interest to continue to promote economic and trade relations with this group. Furthermore, EU will remain a significant partner in our development efforts.

Eurasian Union

In 2035, Putin would no longer be at the helm of affairs in Russia. But Russia will remain a formidable military power with a significant economic strength. Putin's legacy of enlarging and strengthening the Eurasian Union will continue. A few more countries of the former Soviet Union may join the current group of Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Albania. It will be difficult to visualize about Ukraine in the year 2035. The most likely scenario will be that it will get closer to the EU without joining it. With a view to countering the European Union, Russia's aim will be to revive the past glory of the Soviet Union. Even if the Eurasian Union will be nowhere near the EU in economic terms, it will remain an important group.

BRICS and MINT Countries.

Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, collectively known as the BRICS (originally just BRIC and later "S" added with the inclusion of South Africa), constitute a group of emerging economic powers. Conceived as a counter weight to the Group of Seven, it has established the New Development Bank, formerly referred to as the BRICS Development Bank to soften and lessen the role of the established Bretton Woods institutions. The group aims to promote trade and investment as well as work together for the promotion of science, technology and innovation among the members. It remains to be seen how the group would develop and consolidate its position in the years ahead. Will it turn out to be a strong and cohesive group in 2035 despite the members' diverse interests, priorities and problems? Only time will tell.

The same banker who coined the acronym BRICS also coined MINT- Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey. These emerging countries would have reached a high degree of economic achievement with a considerable say in world economic issues. Other countries that would have climbed the uppermost rung of the economic ladder would be South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore (already on the top) and Malaysia. The oil-rich Arab countries will continue to have substantial economic strength and clout.

United Nations

NEPAL's role in the United Nations has been well appreciated. Nepal has become the member of the Security Council twice- 1969-70 and 1988-89. It had been involved and played an active role in the fields of apartheid, disarmament. land-locked and least developed countries and the law of the seas, etc. Nepal's active and growing involvement in the UN Peacekeeping Operations has helped enhance Nepal's prestige in the international arena. Nepal should aim at ever-increasing involvement in the peacekeeping operations to remain among the top of the list.

Environment, Terrorism, Human & Drug Trafficking

Environment and issues relating to climate change will be priority matters in the days to come. Global warming and the melting of snow in the Himalayas will be a matter of serious concern for Nepal. We should raise our voice and articulate our concern at appropriate forums and occasions. The recent news of Nepal receiving the 40 million dollars for climate change project grant from the Green Climate Fund is quite encouraging. We should continue to use and enhance our diplomatic skill in getting maximum benefit from carbon and emission trading system under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Other increasingly important international issues will be the ones relating to cross border terrorism and human and drug trafficking. While maintaining a positive and supportive role in combating these problems, we should also develop our capacity to do so.

Science, Technology and IT and AI

The world would have changed significantly in 2035 due to far reaching scientific and technological progress. There are some predictions indicating that extraordinary inventions will revolutionize our lives. Autos and vehicles without drivers would have become common sight in the developed countries and at the initial stages of introduction in other countries. Robots would have taken over many of the day to day human activities. Space exploration would have gone beyond our imagination. The pace of new and advanced products in the IT sector will be mind boggling.

All these changes are bound to affect our lives one way or the other. Our offices would have become virtually paperless. Our contact and communication would have become so fast that time and distance would be of not much significance. People will hardly need to go to the banks. Many of the services provided by the offices will be available online. We have to adapt ourselves to this changed world in our dealings with ourselves as well as with the outside world.

Flash Points of World Politics

It will be hazardous to guess the Middle East situation around the 2035. While Palestine may have gained full statehood status, its relations with Israel would not be free from tension. Iraq and Syria should have become relatively stable and peaceful depending on how able they are to get rid of the ISIS militants. The Iranian nuclear issue is of a tricky nature. The nuclear deal was seen as a positive development. But US President Donald Trump abandoning it and US imposition of sanctions, reports of Iran's violation of the deal by IAEA and others have made the whole issue messy and complicated. What Iran would be up to in 2035 would be anybody's guess.

Also difficult will be to predict the future of extremists like ISIS, al-Qaeda, Taliban and Boko Haram. Will they continue to grow and threaten the lives of the peoples or will gradually become smaller or weaker? It seems for now and for quite some time into the future, they will remain a threat to the peace and lives in many regions of the world.

Although Kashmir, Koreas, Spratly Islands and Taiwan will remain the other major flash points, it is unlikely that a major conflict will erupt in these regions. Unless some unforeseen incident occurs, they will remain more or less peaceful, although occasionally, tense.

Conclusion & Recommendation

I have ventured to take a brief tour d'horizon leading up to and around the year 2035. What should be our foreign policy in the context of these likely scenarios around the globe? Also, how to gear up and prepare ourselves and strengthen our diplomatic establishment to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future? Here are some suggestions:

1. There should be a national consensus on the broad parameters and the basic premises of our foreign policy. I feel we already have it to a large degree. What is bothersome as well as harmful is the manner in which some of our leaders, from time to time, come out with untimely and unwanted statements causing confusion both inside and outside the country.
2. No matter how the world trends develop, the major focus will be in conducting our relations with India, with China and managing the trilateral relations. Lately, the United States has entered the scene with its Indo-Pacific strategy as a counterweight to China's BRI. We should develop our capacity to understand and analyze the trends of India- China and now, also of China- United States relations, and their probable impact on Nepal.
3. It has to be clearly understood and accepted that our foreign ministry is the focal point of our foreign relations. There should be no room for anyone to grudge about treading on one's so-called "turf".
4. All our government mechanism should closely cooperate and coordinate with the foreign ministry in the formulation of their policies and dealings that involve foreign governments and international institutions.
5. Our foreign ministry is mostly pre-occupied with day to day and routine matters. It should have a strong research and analysis team- unburdened by routine affairs- a sort of a think tank. This team should, from time to time, also interact with academia, intellectuals, study groups, media and civil society on major foreign policy issues.
6. There is an acute need to develop our institutional memory. Many of our bilateral negotiations are not properly recorded. This deficiency puts us at a disadvantage whether it be issues relating to boundaries, trade, transit or treaty matters.

7. The existing Institute of Foreign Affairs needs to be totally revamped in terms of infrastructure, personnel and academic excellence. It should be able to impart adequate training to entry level and mid-level officials of the Ministry while also developing its capacity to provide valuable inputs to the Ministry on major policy issues.
8. A couple of mid and senior level officials of the Ministry should be deputed to the Prime Minister's Office to provide constant and uninterrupted assistance pertaining to foreign relations.
9. Junior level officials should be deputed for a period of at least one year to relevant line ministries like Commerce, Finance, Labour, Tourism, Environment, etc. to enable them to get firsthand insight into relevant issues.
10. Now that we have a federal system, ministry officials should also be posted to all the provinces for a year or so to understand the working of the federal system as also to advise federal government on matters that touch on foreign relations.
11. Entry level and even mid-level officials should be required to learn languages like Arabic, Chinese in Nepalese and even foreign institutes, if necessary. Officials should be encouraged to enhance their English writing and speaking skills. Also, their drafting, communicating and negotiating skills should also be increased.
12. The hub of our diplomatic activity is the Foreign Ministry aided by its diplomatic and consular missions abroad. One of the major problems faced by the diplomatic missions is the "Bhagbunda" culture of our political system. More often than not, party sponsored political appointees have failed to live up to the expectations of their position and duties.
13. The number of diplomatic missions have grown unabated in recent years. The need and use of some of them are questionable. Instead of opening up more embassies we should try to strengthen and make the existing ones more effective.
14. Many of our diplomatic missions suffer from poor and dwindling infrastructure. We may not be a rich country but we have to maintain a certain minimum dignity in our missions abroad. We need not be lavish but our ambassadors should be able to entertain host country dignitaries from time to time. Also, it will be very undiplomatic if our ambassadors are not able to reciprocate the hospitality of other diplomatic colleagues for lack of sufficient funds. Adequate funds should be allocated for travel and entertainment purposes to make our missions active and effective.

ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने तरीका - थरी थरीका



डा. खगनाथ अधिकारी

प्रत्येक पेशामा कुनै न कुनै दिनलाई खास दिन मान्ने गरिन्छ । राजनैतिक नियुक्ति पाएकाको लागि शपथ ग्रहण गर्ने दिन, कर्मचारीको लागि हाजिर भएको वा बढुवा पूर्वी बुझेको दिन आदि खास दिन हुन पुग्छन् । त्यसै गरी राजदूतको जीवनमा ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने दिनलाई खास दिन मानिन्छ । ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरेपछि मात्र राजदूत पक्का हुन्छ । र, सामान्यतः ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश नगर्दासम्म कुनै पनि राजदूतले राजदूतको हैसियतमा औपचारिक कार्यक्रममा भाग लिन पनि मिल्दैन ।

ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने प्रचलनका बारेमा धेरै रोचक प्रसंगहरू पाइन्छन् । संसारमा कूटनीति धेरै पुरानो प्रचलन हो । तर, राजदूत अर्थात् कुनै राजा वा राज्यको प्रतिनिधिले आफू त्यस्तो प्रतिनिधि भएको प्रमाण पेश गर्ने प्रचलन भने मध्ययुगबाट शुरु भएको पाइन्छ । यस्तो प्रमाण लिखित रूपमा हुने भए पनि सन् १४६६ मा फ्रान्सका राजा लुई एघारौं (Louis XI) ले Count of Charolais लाई मौखिक प्रमाणपत्र दिई पठाएको र यसले गर्दा नयाँ राजदूत अपमानित हुनु परेको कुरा इतिहासमा उल्लेख छ ।^१ यस्तै अर्को रोचक प्रसंग चीनका लागि भारतका तत्कालीन राजदूत के. एम. पानिक्करसँग पनि सम्बन्धित छ । पानिक्कर सन् १९४८ मा च्याङ् काइशेककै शासनकालमा चीनकालागि राजदूत भै गएर ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरिसकेका थिए । सन् १९४९ मा चीनको शासनसत्ता कम्युनिष्टहरूको हातमा गएपछि उनले फेरि ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्नु पर्ने भयो । दिल्लीमा कुरा गर्दा एक महिना भित्रमा नयाँ ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र आइपुग्ने जानकारी प्राप्त भएकोले सोही अनुसार प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने मिति तय गरिएछ । त्यति बेला आजको जस्तो हवाई सुविधा नभएकोले पानिक्करको ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र आउन ढिलो हुनगयो; र निर्धारित मितिसम्म पनि प्रमाणपत्र आइपुगेन । पानिक्करले चीनको परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयलाई यस बारेमा अवगत गराए । परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयले मिति सार्नुभन्दा पूर्वनिर्धारित मितिमै प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्न उपयुक्त हुने र बरु प्रमाणपत्र आइपुगे औपचारिक देखिने खाम (official-looking envelope) हस्तान्तरण गर्न सल्लाह

१ Donald E Queller, "Medieval Diplomacy" in Diplomacy Volume 2 (History of Diplomacy), Christer Jonsson and Richard Langhorne (ed.), (SAGE Publication: 2004), p. 193.

दिएछन् । सोहीअनुसार पानिक्करले पनि खाली खाम माओ त्सेतुडलाई बुझाएको र पछि ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र आइपुगेपछि सुटुक्क चीनको परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयलाई दिएको कुरा उनले आफ्नो पुस्तक *In Two Chinas: Memoirs of a Diplomat* मा उल्लेख गरेकाछन् ।^२

परम्परागत रूपमा राजदूत एउटा राष्ट्रप्रमुखले अर्को राष्ट्रप्रमुखसमक्ष पठाउने प्रतिनिधि हो । तसर्थ, राजदूतको ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पनि राष्ट्रप्रमुखलाई सम्बोधन गरी राष्ट्रप्रमुखबाट जारी हुने गर्दछ । सामान्यतः ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र राजदूतले राष्ट्रप्रमुखलाई बुझाउने गर्छन तर परिस्थितिअनुसार यसमा अन्यथा पनि हुनसक्छ । उदाहरणको लागि, चीनका लागि नेपालका पूर्वराजदूत नयन बहादुर खत्रीले आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र चीनका तत्कालीन उपराष्ट्रपति ऊ लानफुलाई बुझाएको कुरा वहाँले उल्लेख गर्नुभएको छ ।^३ आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र उपराष्ट्रपतिलाई बुझाउने कारण भने वहाँले उल्लेख गर्नुभएको छैन । म आफैले पनि थाइल्याण्डमा आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र तत्कालीन थाई नरेश भूमिबल अदुल्यादेजलाई नबुझाई तत्कालीन थाई युवराज (वर्तमान थाई नरेश) महा वजीरालङ्कनलाई बुझाएको थिएँ । तत्कालीन थाई नरेश भूमिबल अदुल्यादेजको बृद्धावस्था तथा शारीरिक अस्वस्थताको कारणले तथा शायद युवराजलाई राजकाजमा बढीभन्दा बढी सरिक गराउने उद्देश्यले पनि होला केही वर्षअघिदेखि ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र बुझ्ने लगायतका कार्यहरू युवराजले गर्ने व्यवस्था मिलाइएको थियो । ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र परिस्थितिअनुसार जसलाई बुझाए पनि यसबाट राजदूतको मर्यादा र कार्यसम्पादनमा केही फरक पर्दैन ।

विदेशी राजदूतले ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने तरिका मुलुकपिच्छे फरक फरक रहेको पाइन्छ । कुनै आवासीय राजदूतले आफू सम्बन्धित देशमा आइपुगेको केही समयभित्रै ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने अवसर पाउछन् भने कसैललाई लामो समयसम्म पर्खनु पर्ने पनि हुनसक्छ । नेपालकै प्रचलन हेर्ने हो भने समयानुसार फरक फरक तरिका अपनाएको पाइन्छ । राजा वीरेन्द्रको शासनकालको पछिल्लो समयमा प्रत्येक महिनाको अन्तिम शुक्रवार ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र बुझ्ने चलन थियो । राजा ज्ञानेन्द्रको पालामा केही परिवर्तन गरी राजदूतलाई ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्न बग्गी चढाई लाने चलन चल्यो । गणतन्त्र आएपछि अनेक प्रयोग भए र भैआएका छन् । यस्तै प्रयोगको क्रममा एकताका नेपालका लागि बढी महत्वपूर्ण मुलुकका राजदूत नेपाल आउनेबित्तिकै अर्थात आएको भोलिपल्टै ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र बुझाउने व्यवस्था पनि मिलाइन्थ्यो । नवागन्तुक राजदूतले आफू आएपछि यथाशीघ्र आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्रको प्रतिलिपि शिष्टाचार महापाललाई बुझाउनु पर्छ । त्यसपछिमात्र आवश्यक प्रक्रिया पूरा गरी राष्ट्रप्रमुखलाई ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र बुझाउने गरिन्छ । यो प्रक्रिया पूरा गर्न हाम्रा शिष्टाचार अधिकृतहरू विमानस्थल गै नवागन्तुक राजदूतको ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्रको प्रतिलिपि त्यहीबाटै लिई अर्को दिन ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र बुझाउने व्यवस्था मिलाउने गरेको लज्जास्पद चलन पनि हामीले कुनै बेला चलाएका थियौँ । अर्कोतर्फ थाइल्याण्ड जस्ता केही

२ K. M. Panikkar, *In Two Chinas: Memoirs of a Diplomat* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1955).

३ नेपालको कूटनीतिक अभ्यास, विष्णु रिजाल (सम्पादक), (काठमाण्डौ: परराष्ट्र मामिला अध्ययन प्रतिष्ठान, २०१९), पृष्ठ १११

मुलुकहरुमा राजदूतहरुले ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्न लामो समयसम्म प्रतीक्षा गर्नु पर्ने अवस्था पनि छ । मेरै कार्यकालमा थाइल्याण्डमा केही राजदूतहरुले आफू आएको झण्डै डेढ वर्षपछि मात्र ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र बुझाएको मैले देखेको छु । यस्तो अवस्थालाई दृष्टिगत गरी थाई सरकारले छुट्टै व्यवस्था मिलाएको छ । त्यहाँ नवागन्तुक राजदूतले आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्रको प्रतिलिपि शिष्टाचार महापाललाई बुझाएपछि आवश्यक आन्तरिक प्रक्रिया पूरा गरी दुई तीन हप्ताभित्र Letter of Notification जारी गर्ने चलन छ । यस्तो Letter of Notification जारी भएपछि ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश नगरे पनि राजदूतले प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरे सरह “शत प्रतिशत राजदूत” को हैसियतले काम गर्न पाउछन् र उनीहरुको जेष्ठता पनि त्यही मितिबाटै गणना हुन्छ ।

थाइल्याण्डमा ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्न समय लाग्ने कुरा मलाई थाहा थियो तैपनि आफू आवासीय राजदूत भएको मुलुकमा ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश नगरी अरु मुलुकमा गैरआवासीय राजदूतको हैसियतमा ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्न मलाई मन लागेन । त्यसैले, थाइल्याण्डमाभन्दा अगाडि अन्य मुलुकहरुमा ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्न गइन । थाइल्याण्डमा पेश गरेपछि मात्र म अरु मुलुकहरुमा ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्न गएको हुँ ।

मैले यस आलेखमा आफूले ६ वटा मुलुकहरुमा राजदूतको हैसियतले र UNESCAP को लागि नेपालको स्थायी प्रतिनिधिको हैसियतले ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र बुझाउँदाको अनुभव छोटकरीमा उल्लेख गर्ने प्रयास गरेको छु ।

थाइल्याण्ड

म २०१५ जनवरी २ तारीखका दिन आफ्नो कार्यभार सम्हाल्न थाइल्याण्ड गएको थिएँ । ३ र ४ तारीख शनिवार र आइतवार अर्थात विदाका दिन परेकोले ५ तारीखका दिन थाई परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयमा शिष्टाचार महापाललाई आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र र मेरा पूर्ववर्तीको फिर्ता बोलावटपत्र (Letter of Recall) का प्रतिलिपिहरु बुझाउने व्यवस्था राजदूतावासका साथीहरुले पहिल्यै मिलाइदिएका थिए । सोही अनुसार मैले प्रतिलिपिहरु बुझाएँ ।

थाइल्याण्डको परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालय निकै व्यवस्थित र गम्भिर छ । उनीहरुले कुनै कुरालाई पनि हल्का रूपमा लिँदैनन् । अझ दरवारसम्बन्धी कुरामा त निकै चनाखो हुन्छन् । मैले आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र र मेरा पूर्ववर्तीको फिर्ता बोलावटपत्रका प्रतिलिपिहरु हस्तान्तरण गरेपछि शिष्टाचार महापालले बडो ध्यानपूर्वक हेरे । ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्रमा अरु सबै ठीक भए पनि त्यहाँका राजालाई गरिने सम्बोधन मिलेनछ । उनले मलाई त्यो मिलाउनै पर्ने कुरा अवगत गराए । साथै, प्रतिलिपि बुझाएको लगभग दुई हप्ताभित्र Letter of Notification जारी हुने र त्यो जारी भएपछि ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश नगरे पनि पूर्ण राजदूतको रूपमा काम गर्न सकिने जानकारी पनि उनले दिए । जनवरी १९ तारिखका

दिन मलाई Letter of Notification जारी गरियो र सोही दिनदेखि राजदूतको रूपमा मेरो मर्यादाक्रम अर्थात जेष्ठता गणना भयो । मैले काठमाण्डौमा परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयसङ्ग कुरा गरेपछि राजालाई गरिने सम्बोधन थाई पक्षको सुझावअनुसार हुने गरी मलाई पठाइयो ।

त्यस बेला थाइल्याण्डमा सामान्यतः वर्षको दुई पटक ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने कार्यक्रम आयोजना गरिने रहेछ । एउटा कार्यक्रम मार्चमा आयोजना भए पनि त्यसमा मेरो पालो आएन । म मात्र होइन, मभन्दा केही महिनाअघि बैकक पुगेका अन्य केही राजदूतहरूको पनि मार्चमा पालो आएन । हामीहरूले अगष्टमा ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्यौं । ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्न बाँकी राजदूतहरूको संख्या अलि बढी भएकोले अगष्ट १८, १९ र २० तीन दिन लगातार प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने व्यवस्था मिलाइएको थियो । मेरो पालो १८ अगष्टका दिन पर्यो । त्यस दिन पाँच जना राजदूतहरूले ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरेका थियौं ।

ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने दिन साँझपख कारकेडसहित राजदरबारको गाडी मलाई लिन हाम्रो निवासमा आयो । कारकेडमा अगाडिबाट क्रमशः पाइलट मोटरसाइकल, सुरक्षाको गाडी, मुख्य गाडी, सुरक्षाको गाडी र सबभन्दा पछाडि अर्को मोटरसाइकल थिए । मुख्य गाडीमा राजदूतसङ्ग बस्ने गरी शिष्टाचार अधिकृत पनि आएका थिए ।^४

दरबारमा पुग्दा शुरुमै जलपानको व्यवस्था गरिएको थियो । शिष्टाचारमा थाईहरू असाध्यै पोख्त छन् । त्यस दिन ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने सबै जना राजदूतहरू आइपुगेपछि ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने तरीकाका बारेमा सामान्य ब्रिफिङ्ग भयो र त्यसपछि सम्बन्धित हलमै ब्याबहारिक रिहर्सल । कसैले राजाको भूमिका निर्वाह गरे, कसैले ग्याण्ड च्याम्बरलेनको र कसैले अन्यको । सबैको रिहर्सल सकिएपछि ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने बेला पनि भयो । तल सबै जना सँगै बसेको हलबाट पालो अनुसार राजदूतलाई शिष्टाचार महापालले माथि लैजान्छन् । शिष्टाचार महापाल र ग्याण्ड च्याम्बरलेनले राजदूतलाई बीचमा राखेर ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने हलभित्र लैजान्छन् । एउटा छेउँबाट हलमा प्रवेश गरी हलको मध्यरेखाको शुरुआतबाट केही कदम अघि बढेपछि राजदूत, शिष्टाचार महापाल र ग्याण्ड च्याम्बरलेनले पहिल्यैदेखि आफ्नो स्थानमा उभिनुभएका युवराजलाई झुकेर अभिवादन गर्नुपर्ने रहेछ । राजदूत र ग्याण्ड च्याम्बरलेन त्यहाँबाट अघि बढ्छन् भने शिष्टाचार महापाल त्यहीं रोकिन्छन् । त्यहाँबाट लगभग आठ कदम अघि बढेपछि हलको बीचतिर पुगिन्छ । त्यहाँ पनि एकछिन रोकिएर युवराजलाई झुकेर अभिवादन गर्नुपर्ने रहेछ । अनि त्यहीबाटै ग्याण्ड च्याम्बरलेनले युवराजलाई राजदूतको छोटो परिचय दिन्छन् र आफू त्यहीं रोकिन्छन् । राजदूत मात्र त्यहाँबाट अघि बढी युवराजको नजीक पुगेर पुनः एक पटक झुकेर आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्नु पर्छ । ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्रका साथ राजदूतका पूर्ववर्तीको फिर्ता बोलावटपत्र तथा राजदूतको सम्बोधनको प्रतिसमेत बुझाउनुपर्छ । युवराजले ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र बुझी नजीकै रहेका कर्मचारीलाई

^४ थाइल्याण्डमा यसरी राजदूतलाई लिन जाँदा शिष्टाचार महापाल वा निजका प्रतिनिधि जाने भन्ने व्यवस्था छ । तर एकै पटकमा धेरै राजदूत हुने र शिष्टाचार महापाल अन्यत्रै व्यस्त हुनेभएकोले सामान्यतया राजदूतलाई लिन परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयका अन्य विभागका उच्च अधिकृतहरू समेत शिष्टाचार अधिकृतको रूपमा जाने गर्दछन् ।

हस्तान्तरण गर्ने र एउटा खाममा राखिएको राजाको सम्बोधन (Reply statement)^५ को प्रति राजदूतलाई हस्तान्तरण गरी हात मिलाउने चलन छ । त्यसपछि छोटो समय अर्थात एकदेखि दुई मिनेट युवराज र राजदूतबीच कुराकानी हुन्छ । युवराजले हात मिलाउन हात दिएपछि कुराकानी सकिएको बुझ्नुपर्छ । हात मिलाएपछि पुनः झुकेर अभिवादन गरेपछि केही कदम उल्टो पछि हटी फर्किएर राजदूत शिष्टाचार महापालकासाथ तल ओर्लन्छन् । अनि पहिल्यैदेखि तयारी अवस्थामा राखिएको आगन्तुक पुस्तिकामा हस्ताक्षर गर्छन् र पहिले गएको हलमा लगिन्छन् । ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरिसकेका र गर्न बाकी रहेका राजदूतहरू त्यहीं हुन्छन् ।

सबै राजदूतहरूले आआफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरिसकेपछि सबै जना सामूहिक रूपमा जलपानमा सरिक हुन्छन् । जलपानमा राजदरवारका कर्मचारीहरू तथा परराष्ट्र मन्त्री पनि सामेल हुने चलन छ । जलपान सकिएपछि बाहिरको सुन्दर बगैचामा सामूहिक फोटो खिचिन्छ र राजदूतहरू आआफ्नो पालोअनुसार घर फर्कन्छन् । फर्कँदा पनि दरवार जाँदाको जस्तै ब्यवस्था हुन्छ । राजदूतलाई निवासमा छोडी शिष्टाचार अधिकृत र गाडीहरू फर्कन्छन् । यसरी राजदूतको ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने प्रक्रिया पूर्ण हुन्छ । राजदूतहरूले ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरेको समाचार त्यसै दिन सरकारी टेलिभिजनले प्रसारण गर्छ र त्यसको भिडियो लिङ्क एवं फोटाहरू केही दिनपछि सम्बन्धित राजदूतलाई थाई परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयले पठाइदिन्छ ।

थाइल्याण्डमा राजदूतले ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने तरीका अत्यन्त ब्यवस्थित, शिष्ट र मर्यादित छ । तर, एउटा मात्र खट्कने कुरा के छ भने ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्न जाँदा राजदूत एकलै जानुपर्छ । आफ्नो साथमा आफ्नो श्रीमान/श्रीमती वा राजदूतावासका कर्मचारी एक जना पनि लान पाइँदैन । मैले यसबारेमा पछि परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयमा कुरा पनि उठाएको थिएँ तर श्रीमान/श्रीमती वा राजदूतावासका कर्मचारी लान पाउँने ब्यवस्था भएको बुझेको छैन ।

सिङ्गापुर

मैले २७ अगष्ट २०१५ का दिन सिङ्गापुरका राष्ट्रपति Dr. Toni Tan Keng Yam समक्ष आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरेको थिएँ । सिङ्गापुरमा गैरआवासीय राजदूत ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्न आउदा विमानस्थलमा स्वागत गरी बस्ने होटलसम्म पुर्याइदिने चलन छ । म र मेरी श्रीमती अघिल्लो दिन त्यहाँ पुगेका थियौँ ।^६ पुगेकै दिन परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयमा गैँ कुराकानी गरियो र परम्परागत प्रचलन अनुसार मैले आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र तथा मेरा पूर्ववर्तीको फिर्ता बोलवटपत्रका प्रतिलिपिहरू पनि बुझाएँ । सिङ्गापुरमा विदेशी राजदूतले ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने प्रक्रिया उल्लेख गरेको

५ थाइल्याण्डमा ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्दा राजदूतको सम्बोधन र राजाको प्रत्युत्तर सम्बोधनका प्रतिहरू मात्र आदानप्रदान गर्ने चलन छ, सम्बोधन गर्नु पर्दैन । परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयले पहिल्यै सम्बन्धित राजदूतलाई यसबारेमा जानकारी गराउछन् र राजदूतले आफ्नो सम्बोधनको प्रति पहिल्यै परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयमा पठाउनुपर्छ ।

६ सिङ्गापुरमा ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्न जाँदा राजदूतले आफ्नो साथमा श्रीमान/श्रीमती र ४ जनासम्म राजदूतावासका कूटनैतिक कर्मचारी लैजान पाइने चलन छ ।

पुस्तिका मलाई पहिल्यै उपलब्ध गराइसकिएको हुँदा यसबारेमा मलाई थाहा भैसकेकै थियो । परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयमा पहिले राजदूतले ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरेको भिडियो रेकर्ड पनि हेरियो । भिडियोबाट धेरै कुराहरु अझ स्पष्ट भए ।

ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने दिन हामीलाई लिन कारकेडसहित गाडी होटलमा आयो । राष्ट्रपति भवनको अगाडि राजदूतलाई सिँगापुर सेनाको टुकडीले सलामी दिने चलन छ । सलामीपछि भित्र गएर एकछिन भलाकुसारी गर्नुका साथै सम्झनाको लागि पुन भिडियो रेकर्ड पनि देखाइनेरहेछ । त्यसपछि माथि लगियो । पहिला आगन्तुक पुस्तिकामा हस्ताक्षर गरी मुख्य कोठामा प्रवेश गरियो । त्यहाँ राष्ट्रपति र वहाँकी श्रीमती उभिइरहनुभएको थियो । अर्को साइडमा सिङ्गापुर सरकारका कर्मचारीहरु उभिएका थिए । भित्र पसेपछि मैले ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरें । प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरिसकेपछि त्यही कोठामै राजदूत र राष्ट्रपतिबीच केही बेर (झण्डै २० मिनेट) कुराकानी गर्ने प्रचलन रहेछ । कुराकानीका अवसरमा राष्ट्रपति र राजदूतका श्रीमतीहरु पनि साथै राखे चलन छ । यही कुराकानी सङ्गै ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने प्रक्रिया पनि पूरा भयो ।

त्यस अवसरका फोटाहरु तुरुन्तै राजदूतलाई उपलब्ध गराइन्छ ।

लाओस

ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने क्रममा मैले १० सेप्टेम्बर २०१५ मा लाओसका राष्ट्रपति Choummaly Sayasone समक्ष आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरेको थिएँ । नयाँ गैरआवासीय राजदूत ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्न आउँदा त्यहाँ पनि विमानस्थलमा स्वागत गरी होटलसम्म पुर्याइदिने चलन छ । म र हाम्रो राजदूतावासका एक जना सहकर्मी साथी ८ सेप्टेम्बरका दिन त्यहाँ पुगेका थियौँ । अर्को दिन बिहान परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयमा ब्रिफिङ्गको कार्यक्रम थियो । लाओसमा पनि मौखिक रूपमा जानकारी गराउनुका साथै भिडियो रेकर्ड पनि देखाइँदो रहेछ ।

ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने दिन हामीहरुलाई लिन कारकेडसहितको गाडी हामीहरु बसेको होटलमा आयो । राष्ट्रपतिभवनभित्र छिरी ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने हलसम्म पुग्नु अगाडि सिँटीमा दुबैतिर लाइनमा उभिएका लाओ सेनाका जवानहरुले राजदूतलाई सलामी दिने चलन रहेछ । प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने हलभित्र पुगेपछि राजदूत र राजदूतको साथमा अन्य ब्यक्ति भए उनीहरु समेत निर्दिष्ट स्थानमा उभिनु पर्छ । लाओसका सरकारी कर्मचारीहरु हाम्रो दाहिने पट्टि उभिएका थिए । हामीहरु निर्दिष्ट स्थानमा उभिएपछि भित्रबाट राष्ट्रपति आएर आफ्नो स्थानमा उभिनुभयो । मेरा सहकर्मी साथीलाई उभिएकै स्थानमा छोडी म केही कदम अघि बढें र राष्ट्रपतिलाई आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरें । त्यसपछि राष्ट्रपतिलाई आफूसङ्ग गएका साथीको परिचय दिनुपर्छ ।

ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरेपछि त्यहीं नै राष्ट्रपति र राजदूत नजीकै बसी औपचारिक कुराकानी हुन्छ, त्यस्तै लगभग १५-२० मिनेट । राजदूतलाई राष्ट्रपतिको दाहिनेपट्टि राखिन्छ र राजदूतको दाहिनेपट्टि अर्थात लाओसका प्रतनिधिहरूको विपरीत लाइनमा राजदूतसङ्ग जाने व्यक्तिहरूलाई बसालिन्छ । कुराकानी सकिएपछि ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने प्रक्रिया पनि पूरा हुन्छ । र, राजदूतलाई होटलसम्म पुर्याइन्छ । त्यस अवसरको फोटाहरू पछि प्राप्त गर्न सकिन्छ ।

क्याम्बोडिया

मैले २९ फेब्रुअरी २०१६ का दिन क्याम्बोडियाका राजा नरोदम सिहामोनी समक्ष आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरेको हुँ । म राजदूतावासका एक जना सहकर्मी साथीका साथ अघिल्लो दिन राजधानी नोम पेन्ह पुगेको थिएँ । क्याम्बोडियामा गैरआवासीय राजदूत ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्न आउँदा विमानस्थलमा स्वागत गर्न शिष्टाचार अधिकृतहरू आउने चलन छ तर होटलसम्म जान सवारी साधनको व्यवस्था भने आफै गर्नुपर्छ । पहिल्यै खबर भएकोले त्यहाँ कार्यरत नेपाली साथीहरूले हामीहरूलाई होटलसम्म पुर्याउने लगायत अन्य सहयोग उपलब्ध गराए ।

पुगेको दिन अपरान्ह परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयमा भेटघाट थियो । भोलि बिहान तयार अवस्थामा रहन र राजदरवारबाट खबर आउनेबित्तिकै राजदरवार जाने समय मलाई अवगत गराउने जानकारी उनीहरूले दिए । हामीहरू ८ बजेतिर नै तयार भएर बस्यौँ । साढे दस बजेतिर कारकेडसहित राजदरवारको गाडी मलाई लिन आयो । राजदूतसङ्ग आउने कर्मचारी राजदरवार जान पाए पनि गाडीको बन्दोबस्त भने आफै गर्नुपर्ने रहेछ ।

राजदरवार पुगेपछि एक जना मन्त्री गाडीको ढोकामै आएर स्वागत गरी लैजाने प्रचलन रहेछ । लाओसमा जस्तै क्याम्बोडियामा पनि गाडीबाट प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने हलसम्म जाने सिँढीमा दुबैतिर उभिएका सैनिक जवानहरूले राजदूतलाई सलामी अर्पण गर्ने चलन रहेछ, गरे ।

हलभित्र छिर्दा क्याम्बोडिया नरेश पहिल्यैदेखि उभिनुभएको थियो । म वहाँको अगाडि पुगेर ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरें । प्रमाणपत्र बुझेपछि राजाले मसङ्ग हात मिलाएर स्वागत र शिष्टाचारका सामान्य कुरा गर्नुभयो । मैले मसङ्ग गएका साथीको पनि परिचय गराएँ । राजाले वहाँसङ्ग पनि हात मिलाउनुभयो ।

क्याम्बोडियामा आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्दा मैले अन्यत्र कतै नदेखेको र नसुनेको प्रचलन देखें । ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्न जाँदा मैले राजा वा राष्ट्रपतिको लागि राजदूतावासमा उपलब्ध भएका उपहार लिएर जाने गरेको थिएँ । यो सामान्य शिष्टाचार कै विषय हो; सबैले लैजान्छन् । र, सामान्यतः यस्तो उपहार सम्बन्धित देशको परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयको शिष्टाचार महापालको कार्यालयमार्फत पठाउने चलन हुन्छ । मैले ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्नुअघि परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयको शिष्टाचार महापालसङ्ग हुने भेटका अवसरमा आफूले ल्याएको उपहार उनलाई दिई राष्ट्रपमुखकहाँ पठाइदिन अनुरोध गर्ने गर्दथेँ; र, क्याम्बोडियामा पनि त्यही गरेको थिएँ । अर्थात, मैले त्यहाँका राजाको लागि लगेदिएको उपहार अघिल्लो दिनै शिष्टाचार महापाललाई बुझाइदिएको थिएँ ।

क्याम्बोडियामा ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरेपछि राजाले पनि राजदूतलाई उपहार दिने चलन रहेछ । ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने हलमा राजाले मलाई दिने उपहार र मैले राजाको लागि लगिदिएको उपहार राजाको क्रमशः देब्रे र दाहिनेपट्टि छुट्टा छुट्टै टेबलमा खोलेर राखिएका थिए । मैले आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरेपश्चात् नरेशले मलाई र मेरा सहकर्मी साथीलाई स्वागत र शुभकामनाका केही वाक्य बोलेपछि राजाले मलाई वहाँको उपहारको नजीकै लैजानुभयो र आफ्नो उपहारको बारेमा बताउनुभयो । यो चलनको बारेमा मलाई थाहा थिएन र कसैले बताएको पनि थिएन । म अलि असजिलो अवस्थामा थिएँ, के गर्ने, के भन्ने भनेर । यस्ता अप्रत्याशित अवस्थाहरूमा मान्छेको सुझबुझ र अनुभवले निकै ठूलो काम गर्छन् । मैले क्याम्बोडिया नरेशलाई वहाँको उपहारको लागि हार्दिक आभार व्यक्त गरेँ र त्यो सुन्दर उपहारले हाम्रो शो केश र मेरो हृदयमा सदैव अत्यन्त उच्च स्थान प्राप्त गरिरहेनेछ भने । राजाले आफ्नो उपहारको बारेमा मलाई बताएपछि मैले पनि आफ्नो उपहारको बारेमा केही भन्नु आवश्यक छ भन्ने मलाई लाग्यो । र, मैले पनि नरेशलाई मेरो उपहारतिर लगेर त्यसबारेमा छोटो जानकारी दिएँ । मैले भगवान बुद्धको सुन्दर मूर्ति लगिदिएको थिएँ । राजा खुशी देखिनुभयो र मलाई धन्यवाद दिँदै हात मिलाउनुभयो । तत्पश्चात् त्यही कोठामा अलिकति पछाडि राखिएका कुर्सीहरूमा बसी झण्डै आधा घण्टा कुराकानी भए । क्याम्बोडिया नरेश असाध्यै नम्र, शिष्ट र भलादमी हुनुहुन्छ । वहाँको नम्रताबाट म व्यक्तिगत रूपमा अत्यन्त प्रभावित भएको छु । कुराकानी सकिएपछि हामीहरू होटल फर्क्यौँ । र, यसरी क्याम्बोडियामा ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने प्रक्रिया पूरा भयो ।

ब्रुनाई

मेरो कार्यकालसम्म ब्रुनाई नेपाली राजदूतावास, बैंककबाट हेर्ने गरिन्थ्यो । हाल यो मुलुक नेपाली राजदूतावास, क्वालालम्पुरको जिम्मामा गएको छ । नेपाली राजदूतावास, बैंककबाट ब्रुनाईमा ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने म अन्तिम राजदूत हुन पुगें ।

मैले २९ नोभेम्बर २०१६ का दिन ब्रुनाईका सुल्तान हाजी हसनल बोलकियासमक्ष^७ आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरेको हुँ । ब्रुनाईमा पनि गैरआवासीय राजदूत ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्न आउँदा विमानस्थलमा स्वागत गर्न आउने चलन छ । साथै, राजदूतलाई ब्रुनाईमा रहँदासम्मको लागि ड्राइभरसहितको गाडीसमेत उपलब्ध गराइदोरहेछ । यसले गर्दा धेरै सजिलो भयो ।

ब्रुनाईमा ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने प्रक्रिया अन्य मुलुकहरूमा भन्दा अलि फरक छ । त्यस दिन ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने झण्डै दुई दर्जन गैरआवासीय राजदूतहरू थियौँ । धेरै जसो क्वालालम्पुरबाट आएका थिए भने केही सोल (कोरिया) बाट, कोही सिंगापुरबाट र कोही बेइजिङबाट आएका थिए । बैंककबाट आउने भने म मात्र थिएँ । ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने दिन बिहान ब्रुनाईका परराष्ट्र तथा बाणिज्यमन्त्री YB Pahin Lim Jock Seng ले ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्न

^७ ब्रुनाईका सुल्तानको पूरा नाम Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Haji Omar 'Ali Saifuddien Sa'adul Khairi Waddien Sultan and Yang di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam हो ।

आएका सबै गैरआवासीय राजदूतहरूको लागि ब्रेकफाष्ट बैठकको आयोजना गर्नुभएको थियो । परराष्ट्र सचिव तथा परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयका विभागीय प्रमुखहरूसमेत उपस्थिति रहेको उक्त बैठकले द्विपक्षीय कुराकानी गर्ने राम्रो अवसर जुराइदिएको थियो ।

दिउँसो हामी बसेको होटलमा मलाई लिन कारकेड सहित दरबारबाट गाडी आयो । त्यस दिन ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने सबै गैरआवासीय राजदूतहरू राजदरवारको एउटा हलमा भेला भयौं । त्यहाँ जलपानको ब्यवस्था त थियो नै । सबै जना आएर जलपान सकिएपछि ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने ब्याबहारिक रिहर्सल भयो । अनि आयो साँच्चै नै ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने बेला ।

बुनाईमा पनि ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र राजदूतको मर्यादाक्रम अर्थात जेष्ठताको क्रमअनुसार पेश गर्ने चलन छ, अन्यत्र जस्तै । राजदूतको जेष्ठता बुनाई सरकारले सम्बन्धित राजदूतलाई स्वीकृति (agreement) दिएको मितिको आधारमा गणना गरिन्छ । ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने हलभन्दा भिन्दै हलमा सबै राजदूतहरू आफ्नो मर्यादाक्रम अनुसार पडितबद्ध भयौं । ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने हलमा बुनाईका सुल्तानको उपस्थिति भएपछि हामीहरू पडितबद्ध रूपमै सोही हलमा लगियौं र चार पाँचवटा लाइनमा क्रमबद्ध रूपमा उभियौं । सबै जना आफ्नो स्थानमा उभिएपछि राजदूतहरू क्रमशः सुल्तानको नजीक गै आआफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्यौं र सुल्तानसङ्ग हात मिलाई लाइनको सबभन्दा पछाडि गै उभियौं । अगाडिका राजदूत ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्न गएपछि खाली भएको ठाउँमा त्यसपछिका राजदूत अघि बढ्थे र ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरेका राजदूत लाइनको सबभन्दा पछाडि गएर उभिनपर्थ्यो । यसरी सबै राजदूतहरू क्रमशः सरिरहन्थे । यस प्रकारले सबैले ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरिसकेपछि सबै राजदूतहरू आफ्नो पूर्वस्थानमा आइपुगिन्थ्यो । सबैको ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र ग्रहण गरेपछि सुल्तान हलबाट निस्कनुभयो र हामीहरू पुनः अघिको अर्को हलमा लगियौं । त्यहाँ सबै राजदूतहरू दुई लाइनमा उभियौं । केही समयपछि सुल्तान त्यहाँ आउनुभयो र प्रत्येक राजदूतसङ्ग त्यहीँ लाइनमै भेटी छोटो कुराकानी गर्नुभयो । हामीहरू आआफ्नो स्थानमा उभिएका थियौं; सुल्तान प्रत्येक राजदूतको अगाडि गै भेट्नुहुन्थ्यो । राजदूतसङ्ग छुट्टै भेट्ने चलन रहेनछ, त्यहाँ । सबैसङ्ग भेटघाट सकिएपछि सुल्तान बीचमा र मन्त्रीहरू र राजदूतहरू वहाँको दायाँ बायाँ उभिई सामूहिक फोटो खिचियो र यससङ्गै ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने प्रक्रिया पनि पूरा भयो । त्यसपछि हामीहरू होटल फर्कियौं ।

भियतनाम

भियतनाम यसअघि नेपाली राजदूतावास, याँगोनको कार्यक्षेत्रभित्र रहेको थियो । पछि नेपाली राजदूतावास, बैंककबाट हेर्ने गरी तोकिएको हो । तसर्थ, म भियतनाममा बैंककबाट ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने पहिलो नेपाली राजदूत हुन पुगेको थिएँ ।

मैले ७ अगष्ट २०१८ का दिन भियतनामका राष्ट्रपति Tran Dai Quang समक्ष आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरेको थिएँ । भियतनाममा ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने प्रक्रिया अन्यत्रभन्दा उल्लेखनीय रूपमा फरक छैन ।

ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने सिलसिलामा म र हाम्रो राजदूतावासका एक जना सहकर्मी साथी ५ अगष्टका दिन अपरान्ह हनोई पुगेका थियौं । विमानस्थलमा शिष्टाचार अधिकृत स्वागत र सहयोग गर्न आउने जानकारी पहिल्यै प्राप्त भएको थियो । तर, होटलसम्म जान गाडी भने उपलब्ध गराइदो रहेनछ ।

म सहप्रमाणित भएका अन्य मुलुकहरू पहिल्यैदेखि बैककबाटै हेर्ने भएकोले ती मुलुकहरूमा बस्ने नेपाली साथीहरूसङ्ग सम्पर्क र सहकार्य हुँदैआएको थियो । र, हामीहरू बैककबाट त्यहाँ जाँदा वहाँहरूबाट धेरै सहयोग प्राप्त हुन्थ्यो । भियतनाम त्यसअघि म्यानमारबाट हेरिँदै आएको र त्यहाँ नेपालीहरूको संख्या पनि कम भएकोले त्यहाँ बस्ने नेपालीहरूसङ्ग हाम्रो खास सम्पर्क भैसकेको थिएन । तै जसोतसो एक जना नेपाली साथीसङ्ग सम्पर्क कायम गरी उपयुक्त स्थानमा होटल बूक गर्न लगाएका थियौं । हामीहरू हनोई पुग्दा वहाँ आफ्नी श्रीमती र सानी छोरीसमेत लिई हामीहरूलाई लिन आउनुभएको रहेछ । अपरिचित ठाउँमा पहिलो पटक जाँदा विमानस्थलमै नेपाली परिवारलाई भेट्न पाउँदा हामीहरू खूब खुशी भयौं । वहाँहरूले हाम्रोलागि समेत भनेर लानुभएको ट्याक्सी भ्यानमा हामीहरू होटल गर्यौं ।

परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयबाट जाने भनेकी शिष्टाचार अधिकृत भने विमानस्थलमा भेटिइन् । पछि हाम्रो होटलमै भेट्न आइन् र आफू विमानस्थल गएको, बाटामा सवारी जाममा परेर केही ढिलो पुगेको तथा आफू पुग्दा हामीहरू निस्किसकेकोले भेट हुन नसकेको बताइन् । हामीहरूले होला भन्यौं । साथै, विमानस्थलमा स्वागत गर्न नसकेकोमा उनले माफी पनि मागिन् ।

अर्को दिन बिहान हामीहरू शिष्टाचार महापाललाई भेट्न गर्यौं । शिष्टाचार महापाल निकै अनुभवी र फरासिला ब्यक्ति रहेछन् । हामीहरू ११ बजेतिर पुग्दा आफूले त्यस बिहान सात जना राजदूतहरूलाई भेटिसकेको बताए । सबैजना म जस्तै ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्न आएका थिए । ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने प्रक्रियाका बारेमा तयार गरिएको पुस्तिका पहिल्यै उपलब्ध भैसकेकोले प्रक्रियाका बारेमा धेरै छलफल गर्नु परेन । हामीहरूले उनको धेरै समय लिएनौं ।

ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने दिन बिहान कारकेड सहितको गाडी मलाई लिन होटलमा आयो । मसङ्ग गएका साथीको लागि भने गाडीको बन्दोबस्त आफै गर्नु पर्नेरहेछ । हामीहरू राष्ट्रपति कार्यालय गर्यौं । क्याम्बोडिया र लाओसमा जस्तै राष्ट्रपति कार्यालयको बाहिर पट्टिको सिँढीमा दुबैतिर उभिएका सैनिक जवानहरूले सलामी अर्पण गरे । भित्र गएपछि एक छिन प्रतीक्षा गर्नुपर्यो, गर्यौं । समय भएपछि हामीहरूलाई ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने हलमा लगियो । राष्ट्रपति आफ्नो स्थानमा उभिनुभएको थियो । मैले आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरेँ ।

ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरेपछि मैले आफ्नो साथमा गएका साथीको परिचय गराएँ । त्यसपछि त्यही हलमै राष्ट्रपतिसङ्ग २० मिनेट जति कुरा भयो । राष्ट्रपति केही वर्षअघि सार्वजनिक सुरक्षामन्त्री हुँदा नेपाल आइसक्नुभएको र हाम्रा केही नेताहरूसङ्ग ब्यक्तिगत रूपमा परिचित पनि हुनुभएकोले वहाँसङ्ग प्रष्ट र फलदायी कुराकानी भए । त्यसपछि हामीहरू होटल फर्क्यौं । ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने कार्यक्रम सकियो ।

एशिया तथा प्रशान्त क्षेत्रका लागि राष्ट्र सङ्घीय आयोग (UNESCAP)

बैंकक पुगेको केही दिनपछि अर्थात १४ जनवरी २०१५ का दिन मैले UNESCAP की कार्यकारी सचिव (Executive Secretary) Shamshad Akhtar लाई UNESCAP को लागि नेपालको स्थायी प्रतिनिधिको रूपमा आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरेको थिएँ । UNESCAP मा ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्दा खास केही तामझाम गर्ने चलन रहेनछ । म निर्धारित समयमा UNESCAP को सचिवालयमा पुगें । मलाई Executive Secretary को कार्यालयमा लगियो । सामान्य शिष्टाचारपछि मैले Executive Secretary लाई आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र हस्तान्तरण गरें । वहाँले मलाई स्वागत गर्दै मेरो कार्यकालको सफलताको लागि शुभकामना दिनुभयो । त्यसपछि Executive Secretary ले वहाँसङ्गै भएका एक जना विभाग प्रमुखको सहयोगमा नेपाल र UNESCAP बीच विद्यमान सम्बन्ध र सहयोगका बारेमा चर्चा गर्नुभयो । कुराकानी सकिएपछि बाहिरपट्टि पहिल्यैदेखि तयार गरिएको स्थानमा आएर फोटाहरु खिचाइयो । र, यसरी UNESCAP मा मेरो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने काम पनि सकियो ।

UNESCAP मा स्थायी प्रतिनिधिले ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्दा सानो समारोह जस्तो अर्थात अलिकति औपचारिक देखिने कार्यक्रम गरेको भए हुनेथियो जस्तो लाग्यो मलाई । अरु केही नभए सचिवालयकै दुई चार जना मुख्य मुख्य ब्यक्तिलाई उपस्थित गराएर सानो समारोहको रूप दिएको भए राम्रो हुन्थ्यो जस्तो पनि लाग्यो । त्यहाँको प्रक्रिया हेर्दा म त्यहाँ गएर सामान्य रूपमा Executive Secretary लाई एउटा चिठी बुझाएर फर्के जस्तै थियो । फिक्का । हुन त मैले आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र बुझाएको थिएँ र औपचारिक रूपमा म UNESCAP को लागि नेपालको स्थायी प्रतिनिधि भएको थिएँ । काम सकिइहाल्यो; भयो । मैले केही भनिन ।

मैले शुरुमै भनें, ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने तरिका देशैपिच्छे फरक फरक हुनसक्छन् । एउटा ब्यक्तिले आफू राजदूत भएको प्रमाण पेश गर्ने सामान्य औपचारिकता मात्र भए पनि ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने कार्यक्रमलाई प्रत्येक मुलुकले विशेष बनाएका हुन्छन् । राजदूतको लागि त यस्तो दिनको खास महत्व हुने नै भयो ।

नेपालमा ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने प्रक्रिया हालका वर्षहरुमा निकै छिटो छिटो र ब्यक्तिगत लहडका आधारमा परिवर्तन भैरहेको देखिएको छ । तन्त्र वा शासन प्रणालीमा ठूला ठूला परिवर्तनपश्चात ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने प्रक्रियामा छलफल गरी आवश्यक परिमार्जन हुनु स्वाभाविक भए पनि छिटो छिटो परिवर्तन गरिनु उपयुक्त होइन । यसमा परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयले बृहत् छलफल गरेर दिगो पक्रिया प्रचलनमा ल्याउनुपर्छ । कुनै ब्यक्तिको लहडमा प्रक्रिया पटक पटक फेरिरहने र शुरुमा भनिए जस्तो लज्जास्पद चाकरीप्रथा सदाको लागि बन्द गरिनुपर्छ । राजनैतिक नेतृत्वलाई यस्ता प्राविधिक कुराहरु थाहा नहुनु स्वाभाविक हो तर यस्तै काम गरेर जीवन बिताएका विज्ञहरु भएको मन्त्रालयले परिपक्वता प्रदर्शन गरेर ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्ने प्रक्रियालाई मर्यादित र स्मरणीय, मितब्ययी, अनावश्यक तडकभडकमुक्त एवं देशको परम्परा र संस्कृति झल्काउने खालको बनाउनुपर्छ ।

खाडीका दुई देशमा सात बर्ष



मधुवन पौडेल

पृष्ठभूमि

१९९० को दशकमा आएको विश्वव्यापीकरणको लहरले विश्वभर खास गरी खाडीका देशहरूमा विकास निर्माणका काम थपिदै गएका र आप्रवासी कामदारकालागि रोजगारीका पनि प्रशस्त अवसर खुल्दै थिए । त्यसै बेला नेपालमा भएको राजनैतिक उथलपुथलले युवा पुस्तामा स्वतन्त्रताको अनुभूति हुँदै गयो र उनीहरू देशभित्र रोजगारीका न्यून अवसर भएको कारण खुला आकाशको खोजीमा लाग्दै थिए । नेपालको खाडी क्षेत्रमा बलियो र विस्तारित कूटनैतिक उपस्थिति नभएको कारणले वैध रूपमा आउने रोजगारीका अवसर नगण्य थिए । त्यसैले युवाहरू आफ्नो बढ्दो महत्वकांक्षा पुरा गर्न वैध अवैध जुनसुकै बाटोबाट भए पनि वैदेशिक रोजगारीमा जान तयार थिए र यही समयदेखि नेपालबाट कामदारहरू विदेशिने लहर शुरु भयो । यो भेल प्रत्येक बर्ष तीब्र गतिमा बढ्दै पनि गयो । तर कामको लागि कामदारहरूको प्रवाहलाई नियमित र नियन्त्रण गर्ने नेपालभित्र रहेको सरकारी संयन्त्र सशक्त एवम् प्रभावकारी रूपमा स्थापित र विकास भइ सकेको थिएन र वैदेशिक रोजगार व्यवसायीहरूको यसैबीच अर्को अझै सशक्त संयन्त्र संगठित हुँदै थियो र यो क्षेत्रमा उनीहरूकै दबदबा बढ्दै गयो ।

अर्कोतर्फ परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालय, श्रम मन्त्रालय एवम् गन्तव्य देशहरूमा कार्यरत नियोगहरूबीच आपसी समन्वय थिएन । त्यसमाथि नेपाली कामदारमा सीपको पनि अभाव थियो । यी सबै कारणले गर्दा शुरुदेखि नै गन्तव्य देशहरूमा नेपाली कामदारहरू पीडित भए र उनीहरू सवैतिर न्यून तलब र सुविधामा काम गर्न बाध्य भए । क्रमशः वैदेशिक रोजगारीलाई व्यावसायिक रूपले नियमित गराउने उद्देश्य भएको सरकारी संयन्त्र संगठित हुँदै गयो, तर व्यवसायीहरूको संयन्त्रको ठूलो अंश सरकार र कामदार बीचको दूरी कम गर्ने माध्यम र कामदारमुखी हुनुपर्नेमा शुरुदेखि नै व्यवसायमुखी बढी भयो जसले गर्दा कामदार वर्ग अझ बढी चेपुवामा परेर वास्तविक रूपमा शोषित भए । यस्तो अवस्थामा आवासीय दूतावास नहुने देशमा रहेका नेपाली कामदारहरूलाई नियोगको सामान्य सेवा आवश्यक परेको बेला दूतावासको अनुपस्थिति खटिकनु स्वाभाविक पनि थियो किनकि खाडी क्षेत्रमा साउदी अरेबिया र कतारमा मात्र कूटनैतिक नियोग कार्यरत थिए । त्यसैले पनि यु ए ई मा नेपालको आवासीय राजदूतावास स्थापना गर्न सरकारलाई विभिन्न माध्यमबाट ठूलो दबाव परिरहेको थियो ।

खाडीका सबै देशमा आप्रवासी कामदारका आवश्यक कागजात सम्बन्धित देशमा आफ्नो दूतावास भए त्यहाँबाट अन्यथा सम्बन्धित वा आफ्नो देशका निमित्त सहप्रमाणीकरण भएका गैरआवासीय राजदूतावासबाट प्रमाणीकरण नगरी कुनै पनि कागजातको वैधानिक मान्यता हुँदैन। यु ए ई मा रहेका कामदारलाई सहप्रमाणीकरण भएको साउदी अरेबियाको रियादस्थित राजदूतावासमार्फत मात्र सेवा पाउने भएकाले समय एवम् खर्चको हिसाबले पनि खर्चिलो र असहज थियो। रियादको दूतावासमा सहप्रमाणीकरण भएका देश धेरै तर तुलनात्मक हिसाबले जनशक्ति कम थियो। खाडीका अरु देशलाई साउदी अरेबिया वाहेक कतारबाट सहप्रमाणीकरण गर्ने कुरा स्वीकार्य थिएन। यस्तो कठिन एवम् विषम परिस्थितिमा बढी समस्या कामदारले नै खेप्नुपरिरहेकोले यही पृष्ठभूमिमा सरकारले अबु धाबीमा नयाँ दूतावास राख्ने निर्णय गरेको हो।

१. अबु धाबी, फेब्रुअरी २२, २००४

मैले फेब्रुअरी २२, २००४ मा संयुक्त अरब इमिरेट्सको राजधानी अबु धाबीमा पाइला टेकेको थिएँ । काठमाडौँको चीसो सिरेटो र त्यसमा पनि फेब्रुअरी महिनामा हातै ठिहियाउने मौसमबाट म झसंग पार्ने तातो हावा खान पुगेको थिएँ। परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयमा प्रवेश गरेदेखि नै धेरै जसो दक्षिण एशिया, शिष्टाचार, क्षेत्रीय संगठन महाशाखाहरूमा काम गरेको र नेपाल बाहिर पनि यही क्षेत्रतिरै सरुवा भएकोले श्रम कूटनीतिमा मेरो खास कार्यगत अनुभव थिएन। खाडीमा नयाँ दूतावास स्थापना गर्न जाँदा के होला, कस्तो होला भन्ने मनमा लागि रहन्थ्यो । धेरै वर्ष अघि म दुईपल्ट गरी एक रात र आठ घण्टाको दुबईको सानो सेरोफेरो र ट्रान्जिट लाउन्जमा पट्यारलाग्दो गरी समय बिताएको वाहेक विश्वको त्यो भूभागमा कहिल्यै टेकेको थिइन।

सात वटा स्वायत्त र लगभग स्वतन्त्र इमिरेट्स मिलेर बनेको संघीय राज्य संयुक्त अरब इमिरेट्समा संवैधानिक रूपमा सातै वटा इमिरेटका शासकहरू भएको सुप्रिम काउन्सिल र त्यसमध्ये संघीय स्तरमा अबु धाबीका शासक राष्ट्रपति, दुबईका शासक प्रधानमन्त्री एवम् अन्य बाँकी शारजाह, अजमान, रस् अल् खैमाह, उम् अल् क्वीम र फुजेराहका शासकहरू सदस्य हुने व्यवस्था छ । संघीय प्रणाली भए पनि सबै इमिरेटहरू बढ्दै स्वायत्त रूपमा शासन गर्दछन्। आप्रवासी कामदार सम्बन्धी कोटा निर्धारण, भर्ना जस्ता प्रकृयागत कुराहरू केन्द्र अर्थात् अबु धाबीबाटै नियन्त्रण र संचालन हुन्छन् । प्रारम्भमा नेपाल सरकारले कार्यवाहक राजदूत र एकजना द्वितीय सचिव गरी जम्मा दुई जना मात्र कूटनैतिक तथा अरबी भाषा जान्ने सेक्रेटरी, चालक र कार्यालय सहायक समेत तीनजना स्थानीय कर्मचारीको दरवन्दी सहित राजदूतावास स्थापना गर्ने निर्णय गरेको थियो ।

कार्यवाहक राजदूत नियुक्ति गरी नयाँ राजदूतावास स्थापना गरेको निर्णयबारे संयुक्त अरब इमिरेट्सलाई जानकारी दिँदा सहप्रमाणीकरण कहाँबाट गर्नेबारे केही उल्लेख भएको थिएन । हाम्रो परराष्ट्रमन्त्रीले त्यहाँका परराष्ट्रमन्त्रीलाई मेरो नियुक्तिबारे लेख्नुभएको पत्र सर्सीती पढ्दा त्यहाँको सरकारलाई नेपालले राजदूत स्तरमा स्थापना भइसकेको कूटनैतिक सम्बन्धलाई कार्यवाहक राजदूत स्तरमा झारेको हो कि भन्ने अलमल परेछ । आफु स्वतन्त्र राष्ट्र हुनु अगाडी बेलायती राजको लिगेसीको

असर भएर होला उनीहरु शब्द शब्द केलाएर हेर्ने रहेछन् । भोलिपल्टै नेपाली राजदूतावास स्थापनाको जानकारी दिन र आफ्नो नियुक्ति पत्रको प्रतिलिपिहरु बुझाउन जाँदा पत्र सर्सर्ती पढेर शिष्टाचार महापालले केही जवाफ दिएका थिएनन् तर पछि पुनः मलाई परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयमा बोलाएर “केही सैद्धान्तिक कुराहरु अस्पष्ट भएको” र “कूटनैतिक सम्बन्धको स्तर राजदूत स्तरको थियो, अहिले किन कार्यवाहक राजदूत पठाएको र औपचारिक पत्रमा नियोग कुन स्तरको भन्ने खुलेन, त्यसैले तिमीले काठमाडौंमा सोधेर स्पष्ट गर्नुपर्छ” भने । यो विषयले केही दिन म अलमल र अन्योलमा परें । मैले “राजदूत स्तरको कूटनैतिक सम्बन्ध हो यहाँ मलाई काम सुरु गर्न अर्थात् राजदूतावास स्थापनाको मान्यताको लागि गरिएको औपचारिकता हो त्यसैले उक्त पत्र औपचारिक रूपमा लिइदिनु पर्छ” भनेपछि आफ्नै मन्त्रालयको कानूनी विभागको परामर्श समेत लिएर अन्तमा समस्या समाधान भयो । भोलिपल्ट परराष्ट्रमन्त्रीको कक्षमा परराष्ट्र सचिवलाई आफ्नो नियुक्तिपत्र औपचारिक रूपमा हस्तान्तरण गरें । त्यसपछि आयोजित चियापानमा उनले “मेरो यति लामो सेवामा आजको दिन मलाई एउटा नयाँ कूटनैतिक अभ्यास भयो” भन्दै ठट्टा पनि गरे ।

राजदूतावास स्थापना गर्ने क्रममा म अबु धाबी पुगेको बेला रियादबाट कार्यवाहक राजदूत रमेश खनाल (जर्मनीका लागि पूर्व नेपाली राजदूत) आउनुभएको थियो । वहाँ र अबु धाबीमा कार्यरत नेपाली समुदायका मित्रहरुको सहयोगले मलाई प्रारम्भिक दिनहरुमा पनि खासै अलमलिनु परेन । केही दिनमै रमेशजी रियादतिर लाग्नुभए पछि भने म एकिलएँ । सहकर्मी द्वितीय सचिव पनि केही समयपछि मात्र आउने भनी मन्त्रालयबाट तय भएको थियो ।

झण्डै २ महिना सम्म एकलै पर्दा मैले परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालय र अन्य सरकारी कार्यालय खास गरी गृह मन्त्रालय, बाँकी ६ वटा इमिरेट्सका सम्बन्धित निकायहरूसँग परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयमार्फत औपचारिक सूचना पठाई सामान्य शिष्टाचार भेटको कार्यक्रम सकें । संघीय व्यवस्था भए पनि प्रायः सबै ठाउँमा नेपाली कामदार भएका कारणले सबै इमिरेट्सका सम्बन्धित निकायमा त्यो किसिमको सम्पर्क र चिनजान अनिवार्य पनि थियो । तत्काल दोभाषे/सचिव नपाउन्जेल सबै पत्राचार अंग्रेजीमा आफुले लेखी रियादस्थित दूतावासमा पठाएर अरबी भाषामा अनुवाद गर्न लगाउने गरेको थिएँ । स्थानीय कर्मचारीमध्ये एक जना अरबी भाषा जान्ने सेक्रेटरीको दरबन्दी थियो, तर तलब स्केल रियाद र दोहास्थित राजदूतावासहरूसँग समान हुने गरी मिलाइएकोले अंग्रेजी र अरबी भाषा राम्रो जान्ने सेक्रेटरी खोज्न निकै गाह्रो भयो । बल्ल तल्ल भारतमा छात्रवृत्तिमा पढेका एक जना सुडानी नागरिक भेटिए । केही अंग्रेजी जान्ने तर बोल्न मात्र, हिन्दी पनि अलि अलि बुझ्ने भएकाले आफुलाई जतिसुकै कष्टकर हुने भए पनि मेरो कार्यकालभर उनलाई हटाइन ।

शुरुमा राजदूतावासको चान्सरी र आवास खोज्ने एवम् अरु आवश्यक औपचारिक र अनौपचारिक काम उत्तिकै चुनौतिपूर्ण थिए । भवन खोज्ने काममा परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयबाट ठूलो सहयोग पाएँ । स्थानीय कूटनैतिक नियोगहरुमध्ये भारत र अन्य केही अफ्रिकी र ल्याटिन अमेरिकी राजदूतावासमा चिनजानका अधिकारी भेटिए । संयोगवश डेढ दशक अघि काठमाडौं स्थित भारतीय राजदूतावासमा

प्रथम सचिव भएर काम गरेका सुधीर व्यास त्यहाँ भारतीय राजदूत रहेछन् र उपनियोग प्रमुखमा पनि मसँगै अमेरिकी रक्षा मन्त्रालय अन्तर्गतको NESACenter मा तालिममा जाँदा साथै भएका सहपाठी पनि थिए ।

शुरुका दिनहरूमा कहिले अन्य इमिरेटहरूमा भेटवार्ता मिलाइदिन र कहिले अबु धाबीकै आफ्नै कामसँग सम्बन्धित अन्य मन्त्रालयहरूमा सम्पर्क गर्न २ महिना जति हप्ताको तीनपटक सम्म पनि परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालय धाउनै पर्ने हुन्थ्यो । तर परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयसँग अधिकतम सम्पर्कले गर्दा उनीहरू मार्फत अन्य निकायका अधिकारीहरूसँग र अन्य पदाधिकारीसँग चिनजान मलाई आफ्नो काममा उपयोगी भयो । एउटा अर्को चाखलाग्दो सन्दर्भ थियो- परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालय जाँदा भाडाको गाडीलाई निषेधित क्षेत्रभित्र प्रवेश गर्न नदिने हुनाले बाहिरबाटै ५ मिनेट हिँडेर जानुपर्दथ्यो । एकदिन एशिया अफ्रिया राजनैतिक विभागका महानिर्देशकलाई भेट्न जाँदै गर्दा चीफ अफ प्रोटोकलले मलाई त्यो विशाल भवनभित्र पैदल छिरिरहेको देखेछन् । त्यो भवनमा २ वटा आगन्तुक जाने लिफ्ट थिए । म अर्कोतिर लागेको देखेपछि उनले आफ्नो सहायक निर्देशकलाई खोज्न पठाएछन् । ती महानिर्देशक १५ वर्ष नयाँ दिल्लीमा आवासीय राजदूत र नेपालका लागि पनि गैरआवासीय राजदूत भइसकेकाले नेपालवारे लामै कुराकानी भयो । म १ घण्टा कुराकानी गरेर निस्केपछि सहायक निर्देशकले मलाई त्यहाँबाट चीफ अफ प्रोटोकलको कार्यक्षमा लगे । उनले देखासाथ “तिमी हाम्रो अफिसमा बराबर आइरहेको देख्छु, मलाई मात्र वास्ता गर्दा रहेनछौ” भनेर हाँसो गरे । मेरो हैसियतवारे कूटनैतिक औपचारिकता पूरा गर्न बाँकी भए पनि उनले पहिलो दिनमै “आवश्यक भेटघाट गर्न थाले हुन्छ” भनेकाले मैले उनकै कार्यालयमार्फत् उच्च अधिकृतहरूसँग भेटघाट मिलाउने गरेको थिएँ । उनले “तिमी किन मूलढोकादेखि यस्तो गर्मीमा हिँडेर आएको?” भनी सोधे । मैले हाँसो गर्दै “मेरो नयाँ गाडी आउन समय लाग्छ, तिम्रो मन्त्रालयभित्र भाडाको गाडी छिर्न नपाउने भएपछि नहिँडी के गरूँ ? काम त गर्ने पर्यो” भनेपछि उनले केही जवाफ दिएनन्, म पनि कफी खाएर विदा भएँ ।

एपार्टमेण्ट पुगेको केही छिनमै रिसेप्सनबाट टुटफुट अंग्रेजीमा एक जना अरबीको फोन आयो, “सर म परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयको ड्राइभर हुँ, भोलिदेखि विहान ९ बजेबाट १ बजेसम्म म तिम्रो ड्यूटी गर्छु” । उसलाई चिफ अफ प्रोटोकलले खटाएका रहेछन् । भोलिपल्ट त्यही गाडी लिएर म परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालय पुगेँ— बुलेट प्रुफ मर्सिडिज थियो त्यो ! अबु धाबी बाहिर लिएर जाने हुने हो कि होइन भन्ने खुल्दुली थियो, एक जना ज्यादै ठट्यौला स्वभावका डेप्युटी चीफ अफ प्रोटोकललाई सोधिहालें । “सातै वटा इमिरेट्समा जता घुमाए पनि हुन्छ, नेपाल नै गए पनि जाउ”, उनको ठट्यौलो जवाफ थियो । मैले पछि दुबई, शारजाह, फुजेराह र अन्य इमिरेटहरूको आफ्नो भेटघाटमा त्यही गाडी प्रयोग गरें । सरकारी नम्बर प्लेट र भी.आई.पी. भनेर लेखिएकोले कतै पनि रोकटोक हुन्नथ्यो र डेढ महिना प्रयोग गरेपछि आफ्नै गाडी आइपुगेकोले मैले गाडी फिर्ता पठाएँ । २/४ दिनपछि परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालय जाँदा, “गाडी किन फिर्ता गरेको, आफु फर्केर जाने बेला सम्म राखे हुन्थ्यो” भनेर ठट्टा पनि गरे । तर त्यो गाडी राख्नु दूतावासको लागि हात्ती पालेको जस्तो हुन्थ्यो ।

यसवाहेक दूतावास र निवासको निमित्त भवन खोज्ने र दूतावासलाई चाहिने अफिसका सामान किन्ने काममा सहयोग गर्न परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयले एउटा कर्मचारी पनि खटाएको थियो । परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयको निर्देशन अनुसार सुविधाको लागि निवास र दूतावासको लागि सकभर ५/१० मिनेटको दूरीमा पर्ने गरी एपार्टमेण्टको व्यवस्था गरियो । झण्डै २ महिनापछि अफिसको आन्तरिक व्यवस्थापन सकिएको र द्वितीय सचिव पनि आइसकेकाले २००४ अप्रिल १० मा विधिवत् राजदूतावासले आफ्नै चान्सरीबाट काम शुरु गर्यो ।

२००४ को शुरुवातसम्म यु ए ई मा विभिन्न व्यवसाय गर्ने ४०० जति वेलायती कम्पनी मात्र थिए र एक लाखभन्दा बढी वेलायती नागरिक विभिन्न पेशामा कार्यरत थिए । विभिन्न व्यवसायमा दक्ष जनशक्तिमध्ये यूरोपेली र अमेरिकी नागरिक, खाडी र अन्य अरब देशहरूबाट आप्रवासीको संख्या बढिरहेको थियो । अदालत, सरकारी कार्यालयदेखि उद्योग धन्दा जताततै अरब र मुस्लिम देशका नागरिकहरूको ठूलै उपस्थिति थियो । त्यस्तै सामान्य कामदारदेखि लगानी गर्ने ठूला व्यवसायी, सरकारी सल्लाहकारको हैसियतका देखि डिपार्टमेण्टल स्टोर्स, नर्सिङ होम, हस्पिटल व्यवसाय, स्कूलहरू, रियल स्टेट सबैमा कार्यरत भारतीयहरूको अनुमानित संख्या २३ लाखको हाराहारीमा थियो । यीमध्ये केरला राज्यबाट पुस्तौं अघि आएका भारतीयहरूको सरकारी प्रशासनिक र विशेष गरी बैंक, रियल स्टेट क्षेत्रमा दबदबा थियो । त्यसपछि बाहुल्यतामा दक्षिण एशिया, दक्षिण पूर्वी एशिया, केही अफ्रिकी र अन्य कम विकसित अरब देशका नागरिकहरू पर्दथे ।

नेपाली दूतावास स्थापना गर्दा त्यहाँ करीब एक लाख नेपालीहरू भएको अनुमान गरिएको थियो, जसमध्ये सरकारी स्वीकृति नलिइ चोरबाटोबाट आएका/ल्याइएका, स्वीकृत मागपत्र विना अनेक उपायले भित्र्याइएका कामदारको संख्या पनि ठूलै थियो । राम्रो पद र तलबमा काम गर्नेहरूमध्ये पनि धेरै नेपाली कामदार नक्कली प्रमाणपत्र र फर्जी कागजातमा आएका पनि थिए । अन्य दक्षिण एशियाली देशका कामदारहरूको सम्बन्धमा यस्तै अवस्था भएको भन्ने समाचार आउँथे । तर कामबाट भाग्नेहरू वाहेक सबैको भिसा भने वैध नै हुन्थ्यो र स्थानीय कानूनी हैसियतले उनीहरूलाई वैध कामदार मानिने रहेछ ।

दूतावासको स्थापना हुनासाथ तत्कालका लागि आर्थिक क्षेत्रतर्फको सबैभन्दा ठूलो चुनौती विप्रेषणमा हुण्डी व्यवसायको दबदबा हुनु थियो । कामदारहरूले नेपाल पठाउने रकमको ठूलो भाग हुण्डीद्वारा नै कारोवार हुन्थ्यो जसले गर्दा धेरै कामदारहरूको रकम बेला बेलामा बिचौलियाले खाएर भाग्ने, पैसा नपठाइदिने जस्ता घटनाले केही कामदारको बिचल्ली पनि भएको रहेछ । दूतावासले नक्कली प्रमाणपत्र र हुण्डी व्यवसायलाई नियन्त्रण गर्न स्थानीय सरकारी निकाय, स्थानीय रोजगारदाता कम्पनीहरू र केही आप्रवासी नेपाली कामदारहरूसँग सम्पर्क शुरु गर्यो र केही समयपछि हुण्डीमा संलग्न मुख्य मान्छे समातिए पछि उनीहरूमध्ये केही भागे र बाँकी संख्या शून्य नभए पनि उनीहरू निष्कृत हुँदै गए । नेपालका बैंकले पनि आफ्नो उपस्थिति देखाउन शुरु गरे र क्रमशः हुण्डीको समस्या कम हुँदै गयो ।

कामदारका सबै प्रमाणपत्र र कागजातहरू यु ए ई को परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालय र यस अन्तर्गत रहेका दुबई र शारजहाका कन्सुलर शाखाहरूबाट मात्र अन्तिम प्रमाणीकरण हुने र यु ए ई मा दूतावासको उपस्थिति नहुँदा रियादस्थित दूतावासको छाप, लेटर हेड र हस्ताक्षर, अनुवाद थुप्रै नक्कली कागजातहरूमा प्रमाणीकरण भएछ। दूतावास स्थापना भइसकेको मिति पछि पनि रियादस्थित दूतावासको छाप र हस्ताक्षर मात्र नभइ हाम्रै दूतावासको नाम भएका नक्कली प्रमाणीकरणका कागजात समेत भेटिए । यसलाई नियन्त्रण गर्न शुरूका दिनहरूमा धेरै गाह्रो भयो। यु ए ई को परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयसँग लामो परामर्शपछि एउटा नयाँ पद्धति शुरू गर्न अनुरोध गरियो । हामी प्रत्येक दिन बेलुकी ५ बजे केन्द्र र तीनवटै प्रमाणीकरण गर्ने संयन्त्रमा दिनभरी प्रमाणित भएका कागजातको विस्तृत विवरण मेल र फ्याक्सद्वारा पठाउने गर्थ्यौं र भोलिपल्ट त्यसलाई हेरेर मात्र त्यहाँका सबै कन्सुलर अधिकारीले हस्ताक्षर गर्थे । यो क्रममा सात जना नेपाली र विदेशी नागरिकलाई दुबईस्थित कन्सुलर कार्यालयले पक्राउ गरेपछि नक्कली कागजात बनाएर कामदारलाई धम्क्याउने गिरोह भागाभाग गर्नुपर्ने स्थितिमा परे। यसमा केही विदेशीहरू र संलग्न भएका नेपालीहरूलाई कानूनी कारवाही भयो । यसअघि नै नक्कली कागजातको आधारमा त्यहाँ काम गरिरहेका नेपाली कामदारहरूको सम्बन्धमा उनीहरूले पनि चासो राखेनन्, हामी पनि चूप लाग्यौं । तर भिसा नवीकरण गर्दा दूतावासले पुनःप्रमाणीकरण गर्नुपर्ने प्रचलन भएकाले त्यस्ता कामदार पनि कारवाही हुने डरले अवधि सकिएपछि नेपाल फर्किने क्रम चल्यो ।

नक्कली कागजात बनाउने कुरा यतिमै सीमित थिएन, दूतावास नभएको बेला यू.ए.ई. मा केही नेपाली म्यानपावर व्यवसायीले यहाँका कम्पनीको नक्कली मागपत्रको आधारमा नेपालको वैदेशिक रोजगार विभागको स्वीकृति लिइ कामदारसँग नेपालमा दुई वटा सम्झौता गर्ने, बढी तलब र सुविधा देखाइएको सम्झौता हवाई जहाज चढनासाथ च्यात्र लगाई कम तलब र अर्को बेग्लै प्रावधान भएको सम्झौतामा हस्ताक्षर गराउने गर्दा रहेछन् किनभने त्यस बेलाको हाम्रो कानूनमा दूतावासलाई मागपत्र पेश गर्नुपर्ने वा जानकारी दिनुपर्ने प्रावधान नै थिएन । कामदारहरू आफु ठगिएको थाहा पाएपछि पनि नेपाल फिर्ता गर्ला भन्ने डरले २/४ महिना चूप लाग्ने र पछि रियादको दूतावासमा उजुरी गर्थे । यसको लागि रियादबाट स्थानीय यु ए ई सरकारी निकायमा चिठी लेख्नुवाहेक अरु केही गर्न सक्ने उपाय थिएन । कुनै पनि कम्पनीले विदेशी कामदार माग गर्दा यु.ए.ई. सरकारले अलग अलग देशलाई कोटा तोक्ने र उक्त स्वीकृत कोटा अनुसार मात्र कामदार ल्याउन पाउने प्रावधान थियो। तर जथाभावीसँग स्थानीय च्याम्बर अफ् कमर्सको सिफारिसमा नेपालबाट स्वीकृति प्रदान गर्ने प्रचलन हेर्दा यसबारे हाम्रो वैदेशिक रोजगार विभागलाई जानकारी नै थिएन जस्तो हामीलाई अनुभव भयो। दूतावास स्थापना भएपछि यु ए ई सरकारले जुनसुकै कागजात अबु धाबी दूतावासले प्रमाणित गर्नुपर्ने अनिवार्य प्रावधान राखेकोले पहिले जस्तो नक्कली छाप र हस्ताक्षर नचल्ने भयो र व्यवसायीहरू कामदारको भिसा प्राप्त गर्नु अघि मात्र प्रमाणीकरणको लागि आउने गर्न थाले । शुरूमा मैले माग फाराम यु.ए.ई. सरकारले तोकेको कोटाभित्र छ छैन हेरेर मात्र हामी प्रमाणीकरण गर्छौं भनेपछि व्यवसायीहरू आक्रोशित पनि भए। तर तात्कालीन श्रम सचिवलाई मैले सबै समस्या अवगत गराएपछि वहाँ सकारात्मक हुनुभयो। यथार्थमा

दूतावासलाई थाहै नदिई कोटाविना जभाभावी कामदार ल्याउने प्रक्रियाले कामदारलाई समस्या पथर्यो र त्यो अवस्थामा भिजिट भिसामा आएका उनीहरूले कामदार भिसा पाउने सम्भावना कम हुन्थ्यो र दूतावासले पनि यसमा केही मद्दत गर्न सम्भव थिएन। कानूनमा त्यो कुरा स्पष्ट नभएकोले हाम्रो श्रम मन्त्रालयको सक्रियताबाट त्यो प्रावधान गजेट नोटिफिकेसनद्वारा थपियो । यसरी पहिलोपल्ट यु.ए.ई.मा भई शुरु गन्तव्य देशहरूमा नेपाली कामदार पठाउन दूतावासको सिफारिस नभई नेपालबाट स्वीकृति नदिने प्रक्रियाको श्रीगणेश भयो । तर दुई वर्षपछि अर्को नयाँ कानूनमा निजी स्वार्थका कारण र व्यवसायीहरूको दबावमा त्यो प्रावधान हटाइएछ जसले गर्दा मैले चार वर्षपछि अर्को खाडी देश कुवेतमा पुनः पुरानै कसरत दोहोर्‍याउनुपर्यो ।

नयाँ दूतावास भएकोले यु.ए.ई.का सबै सरकारी निकायले हामीप्रति सद्भाव र सहयोगी दृष्टिकोण राख्थे । त्यहाँको श्रम विभागले सबै रोजगारदाता कम्पनीहरूलाई नेपाली कामदारको कोटा प्राप्त गरेपछि अनिवार्य रूपमा दूतावासलाई जानकारी दिन सर्कुलर गराउने काम पनि भयो, तर त्यसमा पनि हाम्रा केही व्यवसायीले स्थानीय बिचौलिया प्रयोग गरेर सकभर सूचना नपठाउने कोशिस गरेकाले दूतावासले आफैँ गएर श्रम विभागबाटै कोटाको कागजात ल्याउने गर्नुपर्यो । यसले गर्दा दूतावासलाई कामदारहरूको तथ्यांक राख्न पनि सजिलो भयो र नक्कली मागपत्र बनाएर कामदार ल्याउने बाटो पनि रोकियो ।

दूतावास स्थापना भएलगत्तै त्यहाँ उठ्ने राजस्वको हिसाब अध्यावधिक राख्न मन्त्रालयले उपलब्ध गराएको सफ्टवेयर प्रयोग गरेर प्रत्येक दिनको हिसाब हरेक महिनाको पहिलो दिनमै अनि त्यसको लगत्तै राजस्व रकम पठाउने गरिएको थियो । यो काममा तात्कालीन परराष्ट्र सचिवको निर्देशन र लेखा शाखाका विज्ञको ठूलो सहयोग थियो । यस्तो व्यवस्था पछि मैले अन्य नियोगमा समेत गर्दा लागु गर्न कोशिस गरेर पनि सम्भव हुन सकेन ।

अबु धाबीमा दूतावास भएकोले अन्य इमिरेटहरूमा भएका निम्न स्तरका कम तलब र सुविधामा काम गर्ने कामदारहरूलाई सानातिना कामका लागि पनि दूतावास धाइरहन भनेको बेला समय नमिल्ने र खर्चिलो पनि हुने भएकोले कम्तीमा महिनाको दुई पटक विभिन्न शहरहरूमा म र द्वितीय सचिव दुवै नेपाली समुदायलाई सुबिधा हुने ठाउँमा गएर राहदानी जारी गर्ने, कागजात प्रमाणित गर्ने र उनीहरूले सिफारिस गरेका कम्पनीहरूको भ्रमण गरी राहदानी जारी गर्ने र अन्य कागजातहरू प्रमाणित गर्ने गर्दथ्यौँ ।

पीडित कामदारहरूको सम्बन्धमा सरकारको कडा कानून र त्यसको कार्यान्वयन पनि तदारुकताका साथ हुने कारणले खास समस्या भएन । नेपालका बैदेशिक रोजगार कम्पनीहरूसँग अन्य कुरामा विवाद भए पनि उद्धार गर्ने काममा एकाध अपवाद छोडेर सबैले सहयोग गरे । महिला कामदारहरूवारे कर्पोरेट क्षेत्रको हकमा कुनै समस्या थिएन । घरेलु कामदार पनि धेरै कम संख्यामा भएकाले मेरो पुरै कार्यकालमा जम्मा चार जनालाई मात्र उद्धार गर्नुपरेको थियो र ती सबैको खर्च यु ए ई सरकारले नै बेहोरेको थियो । प्राय घरेलु महिलाहरू भारतीय नागरिकहरूको स्पान्सरसिपमा भएकाले छुट्टी कम दिने

वाहेक अरु समस्या देखिएनन्। म नेपाल फर्कने समयमा भने भिजिट भिसामा नेपालबाट तीन तीन महिनाका लागि ल्याएर दुबईका बारमा काम लगाउने गिरोहको गतिविधि बढेको थियो। यसरी आउने धेरैजसो बीस बाइस बर्ष उमेरका र यदाकदा घरमा थाहा नदिइ आउने वैदेशिक रोजगारीमा आउन नपर्ने परिवारका पनि हुन्थे। केही कानूनी कारवाहीमा परेकाहरु नेपाली समेत मुस्लिम सम्प्रदायका दक्षिण एशियाली नागरिक थिए।

यु ए ई मा नेपाली समुदाय विभिन्न राजनैतिक आश्रय, जाति र सम्प्रदाय, भौगोलिक र पेशागत सामीप्य जस्ता आधारमा विभाजित थियो। तर हाम्रो राजदूतावासको सबै समूहसँग राम्रो सहयोगात्मक सम्बन्ध थियो। आफ्नो छुट्टीका दिन र भीडभाड हुने समयमा उनीहरुले नयाँ पासपोर्ट लेख्ने, पढलेख गर्न नसक्ने कामदारका फारम भरिदिने, पीडितहरुको उद्धार कार्यमा सघाउने गर्थे।

मेरो अबुधाबीको बसाई व्यस्त रहनु परे पनि आफ्नो लागि शिक्षाप्रद र फलदायी भयो र त्यसको श्रेय म अहोरात्र काममा खटिने र मेरा सहयोगी द्वितीय सचिवलाई पनि दिन्छु।

२. डिसेम्बर ९, २००९ कुवेत

कतारमा एक घण्टा ट्रान्जिटपछि हामी अपरान्ह अलि ढिलै कुवेत शहर पुगेका थियौं। एक छिन अलमल्लिँदा अलमल्लिँदै भीडमा सेतो अरबी पोशाकमा एक जना सज्जन देखिए। टाई सूटमा कस्सिएको थिएँ म, तैपनि उनले ठम्याइहालेछन्, “आर यू एम्बासडर् अफ नेपाल? (तिमी नेपालको राजदूत हो)” भनिहाले। उनी राजदूतको खान्कीका डेपुटी चीफ अफ प्रोटोकल रहेछन्। भी.आई.पी. कक्ष बाहिर नेपाली समुदायको ठूलो उपस्थिति पनि थियो, उनैले २/४ जनालाई भित्र बोलाएर ल्याए जसमध्ये एक जना थिए, मित्रबहादुर सिंजाली। राजदूतावास नहुँदा कुवेतमा रहेका नेपाली कामदारलाई केही वर्ष सरकारी निकायहरुले चिन्ने व्यक्ति, फाटफुट अरबी बोल्दै उनी सरकारी कार्यालय, पुलिस थाना, जेल सबैतिर पुग्थे रे ! पछि मेरो पुरै कार्यकालमा उनी स्थानीय कर्मचारीको हैसियतले घरेलु कामदारको उद्धार, नेपाली समुदायसँगको सम्बन्धका सेतु र अन्य जनसम्पर्कको काममा सँधै र सबै समय व्यस्त रहेका थिए।

विमानस्थलमा नेपालीहरुले मैले बाहिर निस्केर उनीहरु सामु २/४ शब्द बोलिदिनुपर्यो भन्ने चाहेका रहेछन्, डेपुटी चीफ अफ प्रोटोकलले भी.आई. पी. कक्षमा त्यस्तो केही गर्न नहुने संकेत दिएकाले बाहिर निस्केर धन्यवादका दुई चार शब्द बोलेर हामी पुराना कूटनैतिक सहकर्मीले बूक गरिदिएको एपार्टमेण्टतिर लाग्यौं। भोलिपल्ट अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय प्रचलन अनुसार ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्रको प्रतिलिपि सहित चीफ अफ प्रोटोकललाई भेट गर्नुपर्ने तय भएको थियो । ।

भोलिपल्ट पूर्व निर्धारित समयमा डेपुटी चीफ अफ प्रोटोकलसँग परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालय पुगियो। म १२ वर्ष अघि एउटा उच्चस्तरीय भ्रमणमा कुवेत पुगेको थिएँ। उतिबेला जताततै युध्दको भग्नावशेष जस्ता देखिने विशाल भवनहरु, चारैतिर सुख्खा र जर्जर भूमि, भत्किएका र साँघुरा सडक, अनि त्यसमाथि गुडिरहेका भीमकाय अमेरिकी सेभरलेट गाडी र जीपहरु देखेको थिएँ । तर यो अन्तरालमा सबै

कायापलट भइसकेको थियो । विशाल गगनचुम्बी भवन, झलमल्ल सडकमा अत्याधुनिक र चिल्ला सवारी साधन, जताततै हरियाली र फूलका ब्याड र बगैँचाले कुवेत शहरको वैभवता झल्काइरहे झैं लाग्थ्यो । कर्निस एरियाबाट गुडिरहेको हाम्रो गाडीको झ्यालबाट देब्रेतिर नीलो देखिने अरब सागरमा उन्मत्त भएर छचल्किरहेको छाल अनि छालमाथि कहिले उड्दै कहिले डुबुल्की मादैँ आहार टिप्न व्यस्त “सी गल्” भनिने समुद्री कागको बथान, किनाराभन्दा केही वर कालो पोशाकमा बेन्चमा बसिरहेका महिला र अगाडि चौरमा खेलिरहेका केटाकेटीहरू समेतको मनोरम दृश्य हेदैँ म परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालय पुगेको थिएँ ।

चीफ अफ प्रोटोकल कतार र दक्षिण अफ्रिकामा राजदूत भइसकेका, प्रतिभाशाली, स्पष्टवक्ता र अमीर खानदानसँग निकट सम्बन्ध भएका रहेछन् । सामान्य शिष्टाचारपछि उनले मलाई “तिम्रो के योजना छ” भनी सोधे । मैले नेपाली कामदारलाई पायक पर्ने ठाउँमा एउटा भवन खोजी मोडेस्ट रूपको दूतावास स्थापना गरेर काम शुरू गर्ने भनी बताएपछि उनले “केही दिन कूटनीतिक भेटघाट गर, पर्सि परराष्ट्र मन्त्रीलाई ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्रको प्रतिलिपि पनि बुझाउ अनि अरु कुरा गरौंला” भने । उठ्ने बेला फेरि उनले “तिमी आजै होटलमा सरिहाल” भन्दै विदा गरे । मन्त्रालयका एक अधिकारी आएर होटलमा शिफ्ट गरिदिए तर कण्टिनेण्टल र अरबी खाना मात्र पाइने ठाउँ भएकोले खाने बेला अलि अप्ठेरो पथ्र्यो, तैपनि अर्को २ महिना उनीहरूकै आतिथ्यमा त्यही होटलको बसाई शुरू भयो ।

परराष्ट्र मन्त्रीसँग पहिलो भेट हुँदा उनले विगतमा धेरै नेपाली राजनेता र पूर्व राजपरिवारसँग पनि आफ्नो भेटघाट र सम्पर्क भएको उल्लेख गर्दैँ मसँग ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र साथमा भए त्यही हप्ता अमीरको दरवारमा हुने समारोहमा मलाई पनि समावेश गरिदिने जनाउ दिए । कुवेतमा राजदूतहरूले आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्न सामान्यतया ४ देखि ८/९ महिनासम्म पनि कुर्नुपर्ने रहेछ । यसरी न नियोगको स्थायी भवन, न अन्य सहयोगी कर्मचारी भएको अवस्थामा मैले डिसेम्बर महिनाको अन्तमा आफ्नो ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरें । यसअघि उक्त समारोहकोलागि ९ महिना कुर्नुपरेको रहेछ । नयाँ डिप्लोम्याटिक लिस्ट नछापिएको र अद्यावधिक विवरण नभएकोले भेटघाट मिलाउन र सम्पर्क गर्न पनि गाहारो भयो । डिप्लोम्याटिक कोरका डीन कुवेतमा नभएकाले एशियन ग्रुपका डीन मलेसियाली राजदूतसँग र न्यूयोर्कमा आफुसँगै नायब स्थायी प्रतिनिधि र अहिले कुवेतमा भारतीय राजदूत अजय मलहोत्राबाट बाँकी विवरण लिएर कूटनीतिक भेटघाटको शुरुआत गरें ।

ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरेको लगत्तै पछि १५ मिनेट सबै राजदूतहरूलाई अमीरसँग एकलै भेट गराउने प्रचलन रहेछ । म तेस्रो नम्बरमा थिएँ, कुवेतमा अमीर ४० वर्ष परराष्ट्रमन्त्री र परराष्ट्र सम्बन्धी अन्य काम गरिसकेका र नेपालको बारे राम्रो जानकारी राखे रहेछन् । इराकले कुवेत कब्जा गर्दा दक्षिण एशियाली देशहरूमध्ये सबैभन्दा पहिले नेपालले संयुक्त राष्ट्र संघमा कुवेतको पक्षमा आवाज उठाएकोले उनी नेपालप्रति कृतज्ञ थिए । नेपाली दूतावास खोल्न अलि ढिलो भयो पनि भने । अमीरसँग म लगभग आधा घण्टा बसेँ हुँला, मेरो कार्ययोजनाबारे उनको जिज्ञासा थियो, मैले चीफ अफ प्रोटोकल र परराष्ट्र मन्त्रीलाई भनेकै कुरा दोहोर्याएको थिएँ । उनी शालीन व्यक्तित्वका राजनायक थिए ।

भोलिपल्ट परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयमा चीफ अफ प्रोटोकलको अफिसमा सबै राजदूतहरूलाई बोलाउने प्रचलन रहेछ । मलाई सोही अनुसार चीफ अफ प्रोटोकलले खबर गरेर गएको थिएँ । “तपाईंलाई दूतावास खडा गर्नको लागि आवश्यक सहयोग गरिदिने निर्देशन भएको छ । त्यतिबेलासम्म कुर्नुहोस्, भोलिदेखि एकजना प्रथम सचिव तपाईंको सम्पर्कमा रहेर समन्वय गर्नेछन्” भनेर विदा गरे । म असमञ्जसमा परें र मैले पनि यसको लागि मेरो सरकारको अनुमति र कुनै पनि कागजी सहमती जनाउन स्वीकृति लिनुपर्छ भनेर उठें । ढोकानिर पुगेपछि उनले हामी यस्ता काममा केही लिखित सम्झौता गर्दैनौं, हाम्रो र तपाईंको बोली स्वीकृति नै सम्झौता हो भनेर हाँसो गरे ।

होटल पुगेर परराष्ट्र सचिवलाई फोनमा सबै बेलिविस्तार लगाएँ । सहयोग गर्छन् भने ठीक छ, कतै हस्ताक्षर गर्नुपर्ने भए खबर गर्नुहोस् भन्ने जवाफ आयो । यसरी २ महिना र दुइ महिना केही दिनमा उनीहरूले क्रमशः दूतावासको चान्सरी र राजदूतको निवासको भवन साथै अन्य अधिकृतहरूको लागि एपार्टमेण्टको प्रवन्ध भयो र मार्च १०, २०१० देखि दूतावासले काम शुरू गर्यो ।

ओहोदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गर्नासाथ लामो समय एकलै पर्दा होटेलबाटै कामको शुरुआत गरें । परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालय वा अन्य सरकारी निकायमा पत्र अंग्रेजी र अरबी दुवै भाषामा हुनुपर्ने भएकोले अंग्रेजी लेखेर रियादस्थित दूतावासमा फ्याक्स/स्क्यानबाट पठाई अरबी भाषामा अनुवाद गराउनु पर्थ्यो । परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालय बाहेक अन्य निकाय मार्फत तत्काल गरिहाल्नुपर्ने कामका कागजात अनुवाद गर्नुपर्दा अड्को पड्को पुराना मित्र थाई राजदूतको पनि सहयोग लिनुपर्ने । होटेलमा बस्न थालेको ४/५ दिनमै कामबाट भागेर आएका घरेलु महिला कामदार होटलको मूलद्वारमा आउन थालिसकेकाले पनि स्थानीय प्रहरी लगायत अरु निकायमा सहयोगका लागि लिखित अनुरोध आवश्यक पर्थ्यो । तर सरकारी निकायसँग पत्राचार अरबी भाषामा मात्र गर्नसक्ने कानूनी व्यवस्था भएकोले मलाई परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयले औपचारिक कुरामा केही गर्न सक्ने स्थिति थिएन । त्यसैले म जुनसुकै जमघटमा पनि अरु राजदूतहरूलाई एकजना राम्रो र मेहनती स्थानीय सेक्रेटरी चाहिएको कुरा भन्दै हिँड्थेँ । यो काम नेपाली समुदायले गर्न सक्दैनथे किनभने सेक्रेटरी काम गर्ने ल्याकतका अंग्रेजी र अरबी जान्ने र बाहिर पनि सक्ने नेपाली नागरिक त्यो बेला कुवेतमा थिएनन् पनि ।

यसैबीच एउटा चाखलाग्दो र बिसर्न नसक्ने घटना भयो । एक दिन चीफ अफ प्रोटोकलले “म एक जना अनुभवी सेक्रेटरी पठाइदिन्छु भोलि नै केही दिनको लागि, उनी केही महिना अघि बन्द भएको डेनिस कन्सुलेटमा काम गरेकी सेक्रेटरी हुन्, अब काम लिने जिम्मेवारी तिम्रो” भनेर फोनमा खबर गरे । त्यतिबेलासम्म सेक्रेटरीको दरबन्दी भए पनि तलब र अन्य सुविधाको निर्णय नेपालको अर्थ मन्त्रालयमै अडिकरहेको थियो । केही दिनमा चिफ अफ प्रोटोकलले सिफारिस गरेर पठाएकी महिला आइन् । पहिलो भेटमै ती जोर्डानी मूलकी महिलाको पहिरन र हाउ भाउ हेर्दा नै मलाई हामीले जति धेरै तलब र सुविधा दिने भए पनि उनका लागि आकर्षक होला जस्तो लागेन । सेक्रेटरी राख्नुपर्ने भएपछि मेरो अनुरोधमा होटेलको फोयरको एउटा कुनामा होटेलले उपलब्ध गराएको थियो- मेरो काम चलाउ अफिस, होटेलकै डेस्कटप कम्प्युटर र सामान्य स्टेशनरीले सज्जित टेबुल !

पहिलो दिन काम सुरु गर्दा नै उसलाई मैले अंग्रेजीमा टाइप गरेर अनुवादको लागि कागज दिँदा “मलाई मुखैले यस्तो लेखे भने त म आफैँ ड्राफ्ट गरिहाल्छु नि!” भनिहाली। जसोतसो दिनको दुई घण्टाले त्यो हसा कटाएपछि “म चीफ अफ प्रोटोकलसँग कुरा गरेर आफू आउन सक्ने नसक्ने खबर गर्छु” भनेर उल्टो मलाई धन्यवाद दिँदै ऊ विदा भई र त्यो दिनपछि आइन। चीफ अफ प्रोटोकल लगातार ४ दिन विदा भएकोले सप्ताहान्तमा यूरोप गएछन् । लामो छुट्टी भएकोले यताउति घुम्दै र नेपाली संगठनका नेताहरु र परिवार भेटेर विदाको समय बिताइयो।

चीफ अफ प्रोटोकल फर्केपछि म भेट्न जाँदा उनले “भैगो म कुनै अरु नै सिरियन अथवा इजिप्सियन खोज्न लगाउँला, ऊ त बस्दिन भन्ने थाहा थियो । ऊ यहाँ पार्टीहरुमा चल्तापूर्जा सोसलाइट हो, तर डेनिसहरुको कन्सुलेट पुरै धानेकी थिइ। मैले Stop gap arrangement मात्र गर्न चाहेको थिएँ” भने। त्यसपछि मैले सेक्रेटरी महिलाभन्दा पुरुष भए वेश, साँझ बिहान काम गर्नुपर्ने पनि हुन सक्छ,” भनेर कुरा त्यहीँ टुंग्याइदिएँ । मलाई वास्तवमा भनेको सबै कुरा मात्रै, बाहिरको काम धेरथोर धान्न सक्ने सकभर नेपाली नत्र कुनै नेपाली बुझ्ने कुनै दक्षिण एशियाली चाहिएको थियो। कुरा यतिमै टुंगिएपछि दूतावास स्थापना गर्दा इजिप्टको नागरिक तर जन्म, पढाई लेखाई कुवेतमै भएको सेक्रेटरी र अरु स्थानीय कर्मचारी नेपालीहरु नै राख्ने काम भयो।

कुवेतमा नेपाली कामदारका समस्या भनेकै घरेलु महिला कामदारको थियो, यसअघि नेपाली घरेलु कामदारको जघन्य तरीकाले हत्या गरी मरुभूमिमा गाडिदिएको घटनापछि सरकारले घरेलु महिला कामदारलाई कुवेत जान रोक लगाएको थियो। तैपनि अवैध तरीकाबाट तेस्रो मुलुक भइ कुवेत जाने लर्को कम भएको थिएन जसले गर्दा पनि उनीहरुको तथ्यांक यकीन गर्न कठिन थियो। धेरै जसो नेपाल र भारतको खुला सीमाना र बेरोकटोक आवतजावतको सुविधाको फाइदा उठाएर पुगेका/पुर्‍याइएका थिए । केही प्रतिशत भने अध्यागमनको खुकुलो प्रशासनिक संयन्त्रका कारण पनि उम्किन सकेका थिए । मूलभूत कुरा वैदेशिक रोजगारमा जान महिलालाई सकभर नियन्त्रण गर्ने खालको कानूनी व्यवस्था, गलत दृष्टिकोण र प्रभावकारी प्रशासनिक परिचालनको अभाव हुनुले पनि घरेलु काममा जाने महिलाहरु चोर बाटोबाट जान बाध्य भएका थिए । नेपालको तथ्यांकले जम्मा ४० हजार कामदार कुवेतमा काम गरिरहेका छन् भन्ने देखाउँथ्यो, तर त्यसको कुनै चित्त बुझ्दो पुष्ट्याई थिएन । कुवेत सरकारबाट मे २०१० मा प्राप्त तथ्यांक अनुसार जम्मा ३९,४७२ नेपाली कामदार मध्ये घरेलु महिला कामदारको संख्या २५,४७८ थियो । नेपालको सरकारी तथ्यांकमा यिनीहरु सबै नै अवैध रूपमा त्यहाँ पुगेका थिए। तर कुवेतमा काम गर्ने ठाउँबाट भागेपछि मात्र उनीहरुलाई अवैध मानिने कानून भएकोले उनीहरु बैध थिए । सरकारी तथ्यांकमा कुवेतको कुनै पनि कामदारले देश छोडेर गएको छैन भने त्यस्तो कामदारलाई कुवेतमै भएको पुष्टि गर्दछ, नेपालमा तथ्यांक राख्दा फर्केको स्पष्ट विवरण कतै पाइँदैन।

घरेलु काममा रहेका महिला कामदार काम गर्ने ठाउँबाट विभिन्न कारणले भाग्ने र अन्यत्र काम गर्ने रहेछन् । यीमध्ये बहुसंख्यक पीडित, व्यथित र शोषित थिए । कुवेतमा एउटा निर्दिष्ट क्षेत्रमा हाउसमेड रिफ्रुट गर्ने झण्डै २५० वटा लाइसेन्स प्राप्त हाउसमेड एजेन्सीहरू थिए र जहाँबाट आएका भए पनि खास गरी आफ्नो देशबाट अवैध रूपमा आउने र श्रोत देशका संस्थासँग सम्पर्क गरी ल्याइएका सबै घरेलु कामदारहरूलाई यिनै एजेन्सीहरूले संचालन गर्थे । यी कम्पनीहरूमा दलाली गर्ने नेपाली लगायत अन्य दक्षिण एशियाली देशका कामदारहरूले बढी तलबमा अर्को ठाउँमा काम लगाइदिने प्रलोभन दिएर भगाउने पनि रहेछन् । भागेर हिँडेपछि उनीहरूसँग राहदानी लगायत कुनै कागजपत्र नहुने र अघिल्लो वा सुरुको मालिकले तत्काल उजुरी गर्नासाथ उनीहरू अवैध अर्थात् त्यहाँको प्रचलित शब्दमा “इल्लिगल” हुने रहेछन् । यस्तो स्थिति नियन्त्रण गर्न र आपद् पर्दा उद्धार गर्न रियादस्थित दूतावासमा सबैको राहदानी सहितको अध्यावधिक रेकर्ड हुनु आवश्यक हुन्छ । दूतावास नभएको र भएकै अवस्थामा पनि अवैध रूपमा आएका सबै देशका कामदारलाई विचौलिया वा एजेण्टले भिसा उपलब्ध गराउने र मोलतोल गर्ने हाउसमेड एजेन्सीको अफिसमा सोझै लैजाने र मालिक खोजेर जिम्मा लगाउने प्रचलन भएकोले दूतावासमा रेकर्ड नहुने समस्या थियो । त्यसै पनि रियाद मात्र होइन कुनै पनि गैरआवासीय दूतावासले कुनै निगरानी, नियन्त्रण गर्ने र विस्तृत विवरण राख्नसक्ने सम्भावना थिएन ।

कुवेतमा राजदूतावास स्थापना गर्ने समयमा विभिन्न दक्षिण एशियाली देश भारत, नेपाल, श्रीलंका, बंगलादेश एवम् दक्षिण पूर्व एशियाबाट फिलिपिन्स र इण्डोनेसिया, अफ्रिकाबाट इथियोपिया र अन्य केही देशबाट फाट्फुट गरी ४,५०,००० घरेलु महिला कामदारहरू कार्यरत छन् भनिन्थ्यो । तीमध्ये श्रीलंकाबाट सरकारी स्तरमा, भारतबाट जाने धेरै जसो नियमित प्रक्रिया अन्तर्गत, बंगलादेशबाट आउने महिला कामदारमा प्रतिबन्ध लाग्नु अघि सबै नियमतसंगत, फिलिपिन्सबाट सबै सरकारी स्वीकृति भएका र इण्डोनेसियाबाट आधा जस्तै अवैध र आधा सरकारी स्वीकृति वमोजिम मात्र आएका थिए । नेपाल र अफ्रिकी देशहरूबाट आउने सबै आफ्नो देशबाट अवैध रूपमा आएका थिए ।

विभिन्न बाटो हुँदै पुगेका घरेलु कामदारहरू प्रत्येक एजेन्सीमा सेक्रेटरी भनिने कर्मचारीहरूले नेपाली महिला कामदारको दोभाषेको काम गर्थे । जसको भिसामा गएका भए पनि यी एजेन्सीहरूकहाँ कुवेतीहरूले पासपोर्ट र फोटो हेरेर रूप, बोल्ने भाषा, शारीरिक तन्दुरुस्ती आदि हेरेर एजेन्टसँग मोलमोलाइ गर्ने चलन रहेछ । मोल तय भएपछि कुवेती मालिकले भिसा र अन्य आवश्यक कागजात बनाइ आफुकहाँ लैजाने र भाषाको कारणले नेपाली महिला कामदारलाई आफू के शर्तमा, कति तलब सुबिधामा जाने हो थाहा हुन्नथ्यो ।

कुवेतको कानून अनुसार प्रत्येक नागरिकको परिवारलाई ४ जना घरेलु कामदार राख्ने स्वीकृति थियो र उनीहरूको तलब वापत प्रति महिना १४० डलर सरकारले उपलब्ध गराउँथ्यो । तर मालिकले प्रायः सबैलाई सकभर कम तलब दिने वा उस्तै परे नदिने र भागेर आएका कामदारका अनुसार पहिले १ वर्षको तलब भनेर अरबीमा लेखिएको वा खाली कागजमा सही गराउने र राख्ने

गर्थे । नेपालबाट आउने जाने, खाने र बस्ने सुविधा एवम् स्वास्थ्य बीमा शुल्क मालिकले नै व्यहोर्नुपर्ने कानूनी प्रावधान थियो । प्रायः कुवेतीहरू साँझमा रेस्टुराँ गएर खाने वा कुनै सामाजिक भेलामा खाने बानी भएकाले धेरै कामदारहरूलाई घरमा खबुस भनिने गहुँको रोटी र सामान्य तरकारी वा सितन छाडेर जाने गुनासो थियो । सामान्यतया हरेक ४ जना घरेलु कामदार राख्ने परिवारमा एक एक जना ड्राइभर, भान्छे भारतीय वा कुनै गरीब अरब देशका, एक जना हाउसमेड फिलिपिना र एक जना नेपाली हुने रहेछन् । फिलिपिन्सबाट आएका कामदार अंग्रेजी बोल्ने, सफासुगधर र रूप पनि राम्रा भएकाले नेपालीको तुलनामा बढी तलब पाउने रहेछन् । नेपाली कामदारहरू सरकारले तोकेको वा अझ कम तलब र अन्य सुविधामा रहन बाध्य थिए ।

कुवेतमा राजदूतावास खोल्नु अघिदेखि नै नेपाल सरकारले घरेलु महिला कामदारलाई बैदेशिक रोजगारीमा लागेको प्रतिबन्ध हटाउनेतर्फ पुनर्विचार गर्दै थियो । प्रतिबन्ध खोल्नुअघि एउटा ठोस कार्ययोजना तयार गर्न राजदूतावासलाई निर्देशन भएको थियो । सो अनुसार दूतावासले भारत, फिलिपिन्स, श्रीलंका र इण्डोनेसियाले घरेलु कामदार पठाउँदा अपनाएको पद्धति समेत बुझेर श्रम स्वीकृति लिनुअघि पुरा गर्नुपर्ने शर्तहरू, उपलब्ध गराउनुपर्ने विवरण, कुवेती पक्षलाई अनुरोध गर्ने न्यूनतम तलब र अन्य सुविधा, स्पोनसर अथवा मालिकको दायित्व, कामदारको सुरक्षाका लागि बीमा व्यवस्था आदि आवश्यक कुराहरू समावेश गरेर सुझावसहित परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयमा पठायो जसमा उपलब्ध गराउने कागजका नमूना मसौदा पनि समावेश भएका थिए । सरकारले त्यसपछि परराष्ट्र, गृह र श्रम मन्त्रालयका सचिवहरूको ३ सदस्यीय समितिले अध्ययनपश्चात् प्रतिवेदन पेश गरेपछि कुवेतको निमित्त महिला कामदार पठाउने गरी मन्त्रीस्तरीय निर्णय भयो ।

अर्को समस्या भागेर आउने महिला कामदारको उद्धारको थियो । त्यसको लागि कुवेतको कानून अनुसार घरेलु कामदारहरूलाई श्रम ऐन लागू नहुने र व्यक्तिगत स्पोनसरको मात्र जिम्मेवारी हुने भएकोले छुट्टै बीमा व्यवस्था लागू गर्नुपर्ने भयो । भारतले पनि केही वर्षअघि एक स्थानीय कम्पनीसँग गरेको बीमा सम्बन्धी सम्झौता तथा श्रीलंका र फिलिपिन्सका दूतावासले गरेको व्यवस्था अध्ययन गर्दा फिलिपिन्समा सबै वैध रूपमा सरकारलाई कर तिरेर कामदार आउने गरेकाले दूतावासले सरकारबाटै बजेट प्राप्त गरी उद्धार गर्ने गरेको, भारतले एक स्थानीय कम्पनीसँग घरेलु कामदार माग गर्ने स्पोनसरले बीमा गर्नुपर्ने र राजस्ववापत बेग्लै रकम सरकारलाई तिर्नुपर्ने व्यवस्था अपनाएको र श्रीलंका सरकारले स्थानीय एजेण्ट र दूतावासले मिलेर उद्धार खर्च गर्ने व्यवस्था गरेको जानकारी प्राप्त भयो । सोहीअनुसार एउटा सम्झौताको मसौदा तयार गरी परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयको स्वीकृति लिई बीमा सम्बन्धी व्यवस्था भयो । बीमा भएको कारणले गर्दा भागेर कुवेत आउने घरेलु महिला कामदारको लागि नेपाल सरकारलाई कुनै आर्थिक दायित्व नपर्ने गरी दूतावासको निगरानीमा सुरक्षित र न्यूनतम सुविधायुक्त सेल्टर संचालन गर्न सम्भव भयो । उक्त सेल्टरमा दुई सय देखि तीन सय साठी जनासम्म भागेर आउने महिला कामदार बसेका थिए । सेल्टरमा दुइ जना नर्स, सुरक्षा गार्ड र दुई जना भान्छे पनि थिए । नेपाल फर्कन चाहने कामदारहरूको लागि आवश्यक औपचारिकता पूरा गर्न दूतावासका स्थानीय कर्मचारीलाई दुई मिश्री वकिलले पूर्णकालीन रूपमा सघाउँथे । यसबाट बीमित र बीमा

नभएका ४४०० भन्दा बढीलाई उद्धार गरेर नेपाल पठाउन सम्भव भयो । धेरैको निहित स्वार्थमा धक्का लागेपछि सवैतिरबाट प्रायोजित रूपमा बीमा व्यवस्थाको विरोध भइरहे तापनि म छउन्जेल यो व्यवस्था संचालित थियो ।

कुवेत पुगनासाथ खट्किएका केही कुराहरु

मेरो कुवेतको कार्यकाल परराष्ट्र सेवासँग सम्बन्धित अन्तिम वर्ष थियो र सेवा अवधि कूटनैतिक दृष्टिले मर्यादित भएर पनि ब्यक्तिगत रूपमा ज्यादै चुनौतीपूर्ण, कठिन र कष्टदायी पनि भयो । नयाँ दूतावास स्थापना गर्दा हुने भागदौडलाई सामान्य कुरा माने पनि नियोगको दैनिक कामकाज संचालनमा धेरै बाधा व्यवधानसँग अन्तिम समयसम्म पनि जुधिरहनु पर्यो । मानव तस्करहरुको संगठित समूह र व्यवसायीको मुखौटोमा निरीह कामदारहरुको शोषण गर्ने धेरै जत्थाहरुसँग निरन्तर भिडिरहनु पर्यो । यो सबै लडाँईमा मेरा दुई सहकर्मी अधिकृतहरुको ठूलो सहयोग थियो ।

१. दूतावासले काम नथाल्दै प्रारम्भिक दिनमा शेख परिवारका सदस्य एवम् उपप्रधानमन्त्री एवम् रक्षामन्त्रीसँगको मेरो शिष्टाचार भेटमा कुवेत-इराक युद्धपछि बेलायतबाट आएका गोर्खा सैनिक टोलीले कुवेतको बमको आशंका भएको क्षेत्रमा डिमाइनिङ्को काम राम्रोसँग गरेको स्मरण गर्दै उनीहरु इमान्दार र परिश्रमी भनी प्रशंसा गरी कुवेतको अमीरी दरबारमा पनि ५० जना नेपाली भू. पू. सैनिकलाई ल्याउने सम्भावनाबारे कुरा भएको थियो । उनले आफ्ना मित्र अबु धाबीका युवराज शेख मोहम्मदको दरबारमा पनि नेपाली सुरक्षा गार्ड देखेका रहेछन् । उनको प्रस्तावमा हाम्रो तर्फबाट तयारी भइरहेको र कुराकानी गर्न कुवेती पक्षको एक टोली नेपालको भ्रमण गर्न ठिक्क परेको अन्तिम समयमा सरकारी निर्णयको टुगो नै नहुँदै नेपालका सम्बन्धित निकायबाटै गोपनीयता भंग गरी नेपाली मिडियामा खबर भएछ । त्यसलाई भारतीय मिडियाले झन् उचालेर “गोर्खा सैनिकले कुवेतका अमीरको सुरक्षा गर्ने” शीर्षकमा मुख्य समाचार बनाएपछि कुवेतको संसदमा कुवेती सेनालाई विश्वास नगरी विदेशी सैनिक भित्र्याउन लागेको भन्दै ठूलो विरोध भयो । रक्षा मन्त्रीले झण्डै राजिनामा समेत गर्नुपरेको थियो । मैले यसपछि त्यस्तो कुनै निर्णय नभएको भनी वक्तव्य समेत दिनुपर्यो र हाम्रो एकजना कर्मचारीको नालायकीले पचास जना भू. पू. सैनिकको भाग्यमा यसरी ताल्चा लाग्यो । नत्र छनोट भएका भू. पू. सैनिकले नेपाली मुद्रामा दुइ लाखभन्दा बढी तलब र सुविधा पाउने थिए र पैसठ्ठी वर्षको उमेरसम्म सेवारत हुन्थे । सामान्यतया सेवानिवृत्त भएको भू पू सैनिकले बैदेशिक रोजगारीमा खाडीका देशमा तीन वर्षको करारमा जाँदा नेपालमा ठूलो धनराशि तिरेर पनि यसको एक तिहाई पाउन पनि कठिन हुन्छ । दुइ वर्षपछि तिनै रक्षामन्त्री प्रधानमन्त्री भए ।

२. चान्सरीमा काम शुरु नगर्दै एउटा अरबी भाषाको कुवेती दैनिक पत्रिकामा नेपालले “देशभित्र रहेको राजनैतिक समस्या र अन्योलको समयमा” राजदूतावास खोलेको, वर्षौंसम्म वास्ता नगरेर बिचल्लीमा परेका नेपाली कामदारलाई केही त्राण मिला नमिल्ला, अहिलेसम्म चान्सरी नै खोल्न सकेको छैन इत्यादि कुरा लेखेर अलि झस्काउने हल्का र गलत सन्देश दिने समाचार

आयो । केही दक्षिण एशियाली एजेन्सीलाई समाचार दिने ती कुवेती महिला पत्रकार राम्रै परिवारकी रहिछन् । समाचार र टिप्पणी पढ्दा एक पटक भेट गर्ने ईच्छा भएकोले समय लिएर म उनको च्याम्बरमा पुगें । आधा घण्टा जति कुराकानी गर्दा त्यो समाचार बनाउन कसैले प्रायोजन गरेर लेखाए जस्तो लाग्यो । हेर्नमा उनी शिष्ट र शालीन जस्ती देखिन्थिन् । परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालय र अन्य केही राजदूतको सहयोगले पछिका दिनमा पनि मेरो उनीसँग राम्रै सम्बन्ध रह्यो । हाम्रो अनुरोधमा विशेष गरी कुवेतीद्वारा पीडित घरेलु महिला कामदारहरूको सम्बन्धमा बेला बेलामा उनले अरबी भाषामा समाचार र लेख बनाउँथिन् । आफ्ने कार्यकालमा मैले सँधै स्थानीय प्रेससँग मर्यादित र सौहार्दपूर्ण सम्बन्ध राखेको थिएँ ।

३. हाम्रो प्रशासनिक कामकाजमा अपेक्षित रूपमा अन्तरमन्त्रालय समन्वय नभएको कारणले दूतावासहरूको दैनिक काममा पनि बारम्बार बाधा व्यवधान आइरहने त सामान्य भइसकेको हो । तर, नेपाली आप्रवासी कामदारका अनेकौँ समस्याले थिचिएका बेला तत्काल कुनै निर्णय गर्नुपर्दा थप कठिनाई हुन्थ्यो । केही श्रम सहचारीलाई पर्याप्त अभिमुखीकरण तालीम नभएकोले उनीहरू आफूलाई दूतावासको एउटा सदस्य मान्नुभन्दा नेपालकै श्रम कार्यालयमा काम गरे जस्तो ठानेको पनि देखियो । एकाध अपवाद बाहेक बैदेशिक रोजगार विभागको संरचना वदलिँदा वा नयाँ नेतृत्व आउनासाथ बारम्बार दूतावासको काममा अनावश्यक व्यवधान ल्याउन सक्ने समस्या निरन्तर आइरहन्थे । कूटनैतिक कागजातमा प्रमाणीकरण गर्दा परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयका अधिकृतले मात्र किन गर्ने भन्ने विवाद पनि आयो । केही नियोगमा जवर्जस्ती यस्तो गरिएको पनि रहेछ तर यो अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय प्रचलन होइन । कुनै देशले प्रथम सचिव, द्वितीय सचिव आदि दर्जा दिएर प्रमाणीकरण गराएका उदाहरण चाँहि छन् । जे भए पनि यो विवाद हुनुपर्ने विषय होइन ।

उपसंहार

खाडीका दुई विकसित र वैभवशाली देशमा झण्डै ७ वर्ष विताउँदा आफूले देखेका, भोगेका र सिकेका धेरै कुराहरू संझदा श्रम कूटनीति बाहेक हाम्रो नियोगमा काम गर्ने कूटनैतिक अधिकारीले ख्याल गर्नुपर्ने धेरै कुरा छन् । खाडी क्षेत्र नेपाली कामदारहरूका लागि अत्यन्तै कठिन, समस्याग्रस्त र संघर्षपूर्ण क्षेत्र भए पनि एक पटक गएका कामदारहरू फेरि पनि त्यहीँ फर्किन चाहन्छन् किनभने धेरै सकारात्मक पक्षले उनीहरूलाई आकर्षण गरिरहन्छ । कामदारको दृष्टिमा संयुक्त अरब इमिरेट्स भौगोलिक आकारमा अलि ठूलो, अलि बढी खुल्ला, सुविधायुक्त र नरम नीति भएको देश मानिन्छ । कुवेत भूगोलमा हेर्दा अलि सानो छ तर त्यहाँ तलब सुविधा र आमदानी राम्रो हुनुका साथै धेरै वचत पनि गर्न सकिन्छ ।

अरबी देशहरूमा व्यक्तिगत सम्बन्धको ठूलो महत्व हुने रहेछ । संयुक्त अरब इमिरेट्समा मजलिस र कुवेतमा दिवानिया भनिने साँझका भेटघाटहरू आपसी सम्पर्क बढाउने माध्यम हुन् । यी मजलिस/दिवानियामा एउटा निश्चित समय र स्थानमा आगन्तुकहरू छोटो समयमा शिष्टाचार व्यक्त गर्न जान्छन् जसले उनीहरूको शब्दमा “वास्ता” बढाउँछ । राजदूतहरूको निमित्त यस्तो भेला आफ्नो हित प्रवर्धन गर्ने र आफ्नो काम फत्ते गराउन सकिने थलो पनि हो ।

अरबीहरूको संस्कृतिमा झूटो बोल्न नहुने, एउटै कुरा दोहोर्याई तेहेर्याइ नभन्ने र शुक्ष्म रूपले अध्ययन गरेपछि मात्र जवाफ दिने प्रचलन हुन्छ । उनीहरूमा निर्णयहीनता ज्यादै नै कम मात्रामा हुन्छ । हामीले पनि एउटै कुरा ताकेता गरिरहेको उनीहरूले रुचाउँदैनन् । उनीहरू परम्परा र रहनसहनलाई निरन्तरता दिनुपर्छ भन्ने विश्वास गर्छन् । सबै अरबी सबै ठाउँमा र सबै कुरामा धर्मान्ध हुँदैनन् र निर्णय लिने स्तरमा उनीहरूमा त्यस्तो संकेतसम्म पनि देखिन्न । कानूनको सम्मान गर्छन् तर मौखिक विश्वसनीयतामा नै महत्वपूर्ण निर्णयहरू गरिन्छन् र कार्यान्वयन पनि हुन्छन् । प्रत्यक्ष सम्पर्क भइसकेको व्यक्ति सोझै आफ्नो सम्पर्कमै रहिरहोस् भन्ने अपेक्षा राख्छन् । औपचारिक कुराहरूमा सामान्य प्रोटोकलका कुरा र प्रचलनको पनि कडाईका साथ निर्वाह गर्छन् । यी कुराहरूलाई ध्यानमा राखी सोही अनुसार व्यवहार गर्न सके खाडी क्षेत्रमा हाम्रो कूटनीति अझ सबल र सफल हुने देखिन्छ ।

A Must Serve Outpost: My First Diplomatic Posting in New Delhi



Madhu Raman Acharya

After my promotion to the Joint Secretary level in the Diplomatic Group, as the Foreign Service was then known, I did not expect to be posted in New Delhi. Rather, I was expecting to wait a bit longer in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to become an ambassador, as careerists would be appointed to that post upon achieving some seniority and experience in the service. Sometime in the month of September 1997 when I was the Joint Secretary of the Administration Division of the Ministry, Dr. Bhekh Bahadur Thapa, who had just been appointed as Nepal's ambassador to India, came to see me in my office. He asked me if I would be interested to join his team as the Deputy Chief of Mission in the Nepali embassy in New Delhi. Despite my initial reluctance to go as a deputy, I accepted the offer with the aspiration that I would have much to learn from Dr. Thapa, an acclaimed and seasoned diplomat. That landed me in New Delhi as the Minister/Deputy Chief of Mission in the "Royal Nepalese Embassy", as Nepal's embassy used to be known until then. I arrived New Delhi to assume the post on 2nd October, coinciding with Mahatma Gandhi's birthday. It so turned out that my first diplomatic posting, though short in stint of a little over one year, would become a rewarding experience and a solid stepping-stone to my further diplomatic career in which I had the opportunity to serve as Nepal's Ambassador to Bangladesh (1998-2001), Foreign Secretary (2001-2005) and the Permanent Representative to the UN in New York (2005-09). For Nepal's diplomacy, the post in New Delhi is considered really worthwhile and challenging assignment in view of the extensive nature of bilateral relations between Nepal and India and also in view of the number of embassies and the size of the diplomatic corps in the Indian capital. Apart from covering a wide range of bilateral issues, including political and diplomatic relations, security, trade, water resources, boundary, and economic cooperation, I was also asked to look after some 54 embassies in New Delhi that were accredited to Nepal in absence of their missions in Kathmandu.

High Level Visits

My first exposure to a big diplomatic event after landing in New Delhi was to prepare for the unofficial visit of King Birendra to India, which was due two weeks after my arrival. As Ambassador Dr. Bhekh Bahadur Thapa had yet to assume office in view of the process involved in diplomatic clearance and credentials, I was asked to work

as Charge d' Affaires or the Acting Head of the Mission. In that capacity, I had the opportunity to work with Indian diplomats, including the Chief of Protocol Mr. Pinak Chakravorty and the Joint Secretary of the Northern Division, Mr. Sudheer Byas at the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to make detailed preparation for the royal visit. The job of preparing for the visit also became easier as I was supported with good staff in the Embassy, including Dr. Ram Bhakta Thakur who was serving as the acting Head of Mission before my arrival. First Secretary Mr. Shanker Bairagi, who would later become Nepal's foreign secretary and First Secretary Mr. Yadav Khanal were among the competent staff available in the Embassy to support me in that and other tasks.

Though it was named "unofficial visit", New Delhi had treated the King's visit almost on a par with the state visit of the Head of State, except for a few ceremonial things. My nervousness for the preparation for the visit eased as Dr. Thapa assumed his duty as Ambassador and soon presented his credentials to President Mr. K. R. Narayanan, who he had known since both had served as ambassadors of the respective countries to the United States of America at about the same time. When I accompanied Dr. Thapa during the presentation of his credentials, I could grasp the width of the personal friendship between the Ambassador and the President. I later learned that Dr. Rita Thapa, spouse of Dr. Bhekh and then a Director at the WHO's regional office in New Delhi, had also good friendship with Mrs. Narayanan from their time in Washington DC. The unofficial visit of King Birendra went off well, thanks to our meticulous preparations. There were 'informal' talks between the King and the Indian leaders, some of which I had the opportunity to participate. Because of the unofficial nature of the visit and because substantive issues were dealt with at the government-to-government level, the discussions were focused on courtesies. Event though, the warmth of relation between the King and India's senior government leaders was clearly visible. Later, King Birendra would be invited as the Chief Guest on the Indian Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi in 1999.

Among other important events during my tenure in New Delhi was the state visit of President K. R. Naryanan to Nepal on 28-30 May, 1998. As it was the state visit by an Indian President in more than a decade and it was his first visit abroad, the visit had been given good significance in New Delhi and in Kathmandu. Though such state visits were mostly ceremonial and no major departures were expected, I prepared briefs and papers for the substantive issues, as there would be contacts including that at the highest political level. Since Ambassador Thapa flew off to Kathmandu in advance of the visit, I had the opportunity to see off President Narayanan at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi. That was my first opportunity to be lined up with senior Indian political and diplomatic officials while seeing off the President at the airport. I also had the opportunity to have a similar line-up at the airport upon the President's arrival back from Kathmandu. It was really courteous of the President to stop by me at the welcoming queue to greet me with a warm handshake, saying "Greetings from Kathmandu!" and thank us for the "excellent visit". I gathered that the

visit went off well. Later, I had the opportunity to accompany Nepal's Heads of State and Government on several other occasions during their meetings with President Narayanan, who was himself a seasoned diplomat and soft-spoken person that exuded wisdom and experience in his dealings with his counterparts and other political and diplomatic officials.

Nuclear Tests

Another interesting event during my stay in New Delhi was India's nuclear tests in May 1998, breaking their pledge not to make nuclear bombs. Indians greeted their "success" with a great fanfare and the BJP government led by Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee took a great pride in making this bold step of acquiring the "nuclear weapon state" status. Pakistan responded in kind exploding its nuclear devices too. The international community, mainly the Western countries reacted sharply. The United States and EU imposed sanctions against both India and Pakistan. Nepal's government issued a statement expressing concern at the tests. We had reasons to be concerned, as the tests could start an arms race in the regions also the sanctions could affect Nepal's economy indirectly, because of its link with India's. In the Embassy, I developed briefs and papers on developing scenarios in the post-test period. It was my view that a conventional war between India and Pakistan had become a lesser possibility after the nuclear tests, which served as a major deterrent. In the long run, both India and Pakistan graduated from their status of "threshold" nuclear states to become full swing "nuclear powers", and received support of the other nuclear powers, though they are yet to be accepted to the Nuclear Security Group (NSG), an exclusive club of the big nuclear powers.

Jain Report

In one embarrassing event, we in the Embassy panicked when we heard that the infamous Jain Report on the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi came out, as it had some damaging remarks about the Nepal's royal family, especially Queen Aishwarya. The report cited some intelligence sources quoting a police official in Nepal that Queen Aishwarya was hiring an assassination squad for Rajiv's murder. It was not only highly fictitious; it was malicious as well. I remember we had to try hard to obtain a copy of the report. Upon my advice, Mr. Deependra Bista, Counsellor of the Embassy, obtained the report from the library of the parliament. Ambassador Thapa visited the Ministry of External Affairs to lodge our protest. Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs also issued a strongly worded statement in protest of the report's reference to Nepal's queen.

Bilateral Meetings

During my stint in New Delhi, I had the opportunity of participating in quite a few bilateral meetings. Most conspicuously, I took part in two joint working group meetings on water resources, which were focused on finalizing the DPR of the Pancheswor Project, which had become a hot issue after the ratification of the Mahakali Treaty by Nepal's parliament. There was not substantive progress due to differences between

the both sides on issues of share of water, issue of the lower consumptive use, cost and benefit sharing formula and other details of the project. That gave us reason to believe that India's focus was to regularize the controversial Tanakpur Agreement (1991) and they were least interested in other aspects of the "integrated development of the Mahakali River" as the treaty was supposed to do. Regrettably, the Pancheswor project still remains at limbo. I also took part in the bilateral officials meetings on border management, customs officials and the Commerce Secretaries and Home Secretaries of the both countries. I had to engage in a lot of informal negotiations and preparations ahead of these meetings.

Until that time, our embassy in New Delhi had been relegated to the sideline from our own government and it was hardly involved in the substantive business. The Nepali officials and ministers in Kathmandu used to contact the Indian Embassy for any bilateral business often ignoring our presence in New Delhi and sometimes bypassing and without informing us altogether. They used to contact us in New Delhi only when they needed some personal errands done or when there were big problems that could not be of interest of the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu. I remember, in one particular episode of getting some concession to the Nepali Haj pilgrims in the Air India flights, Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa himself called me and asked to push for securing such concession from the Indian officials. The Embassy of India in Kathmandu had not shown any interest in handling the matter. This was a problem that had been accumulated in our diplomatic practice for a long time. Hopefully, this has started to become less common nowadays.

During our time, we sought to correct that malpractice, albeit without much success. Under the guidance, leadership and support of Ambassador Dr. Thapa, I pushed myself in all important delegation-level bilateral meetings held both in New Delhi and in Kathmandu. Though my contribution to such meetings was marginal, I could hugely benefit from these meetings, which would serve as a good background during my later dealing with India as Nepal's Foreign Secretary.

Bilateral Mechanisms

While I was in New Delhi, a significant amount of my energy and time was spent on getting the Treaty of Transit between Nepal and India renewed. I was pressing the Indian officials to give some indication of automatic renewal of the transit treaty. We were so frustrated by the slow response of the Indian officials that even a "statement of intent" from India in support of the automatic renewal provision that was there in the treaty would be a big achievement for us at some point. The treaty was eventually renewed in December 1998, two months after my departure from New Delhi. Nepal had experienced similar difficulties in renewing the bilateral Treaty of Trade (1991) in 1996, when several liberal clauses in favour of Nepal in the 1991 treaty were withdrawn during the renewal.

As Ambassador Thapa focused himself on high-level political and diplomatic dealings, he had delegated me almost entire administrative tasks of the Mission and had asked me to maintain good contacts with my counterparts in the MEA and other relevant ministries of the Government of India. I had developed good friendship and regular contact with Mr. Sudheer Vyas, Joint Secretary at the Northern Division of the MEA, who was responsible for handling Nepal and Bhutan. We had agreed for a regular monthly round-up of all bilateral issues in informal meeting at his office. That would provide a good momentum for clearing the pending things and making progress in bilateral issues agreed at the political and higher diplomatic levels. That helped me update the substantive issues regularly. We also kept discussing the issues at hand extensively and agreed to schedule the meetings of various bilateral mechanisms for various issues. I remember there were more than two-dozen agreed bilateral mechanisms on issues including security, border, trade, water resources and the like. Such informal monthly meetings with Mr. Vyas also gave me good points to include in the draft of Ambassador's monthly report to Kathmandu, which Dr. Thapa had regularized since his arrival and had asked me to put together a draft for his perusal before he sent his report to Kathmandu. I also had good contacts with other officials of the MEA, including Mr. Harsh Vardhan Shringla, a Nepali-speaking person of Darjeeling origin. He would also serve in India's mission in New York while I was the Permanent Representative to the UN there. Mr. Shringla would later become India's ambassador to the USA and India's Foreign Secretary.

I had good access to senior Indian government officials, including the Secretaries at the Ministry of Home, Commerce and Water Resources. I used to visit them regularly before bilateral consultations or on issues cropping up from time to time. During my time, the Home Secretary level consultation was just taking shape. I remember I went around with Home Secretary Padam Prasad Pokharel in his meetings with officials in New Delhi during one such consultation. At that time, Nepal was seeking India's help in arresting the suspects of the murder of a Nepali member of parliament, Mr. Mirza Dilsad Beg. Eventually, a few culprits were arrested and handed over to Nepal informally. I had doubts about the involvement of Nepali police official in such arrest in Mumbai, for that would invite reciprocal request from the Indian police for their involvement in Nepal in the event of a similar situation. Nepal's home ministry officials were more interested in getting the culprits immediately, not concerned of the longer-term diplomatic consequences. It so happened that Indian police officials were found involved in the arrest of some Nepali suspects in Baneswor, Kathmandu, a few years later, something that would invite a lot of controversy back home.

An embarrassing episode on the supply of sugar taught me a lesson while I was in New Delhi. I was wrongly impressed upon by the local office of the Salt Trading Corporation to write a note to the Indian government asking to convert the sugar quota at a levy price only to discover later that the Council of Ministers back home had not taken a decision on this issue. I had to write to the Indian officials asking them to cancel the

note. A gang of sorts was operational in New Delhi to convert that quota into levy for a heavy price difference across the two sides of the border. This was also supported by the members of parliament from bordering constituencies of the Indian state of Bihar, who had impressed upon the Indian officials that converting the regular sugar to Nepal to levy price would ease supply in their areas.

Coordination with Concurrently Accredited Missions

Ambassador Dr. Thapa had also asked me to look after 54 diplomatic missions in New Delhi that were accredited to Nepal from the Indian capital in absence of their missions in Kathmandu. It was quite good for diplomatic contacts, but a lot of job to coordinate their business and the bilateral relations with each of them. I could establish good contacts with diplomats from many countries, mainly from a group called "small missions" which had just begun. The active members of the group included diplomats from Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Denmark, Ireland, New Zealand, Namibia, Norway, Singapore, Slovakia, Sri Lanka, Sweden. I would go out for lunch with some of them and would get invited to their places quite regularly. I had good relations with many diplomats and would remain in touch with some of them thereafter. I remember Mr. Alimul Huque of Bangladesh would later become High Commissioner of Bangladesh to Pakistan, Mr. Daw Penjo of Bhutan would later become that country's Permanent Representative in New York. Mr. Prasad Kariyawasam, who was Sri Lanka's deputy chief of mission at the time, and I became good friends thereafter. We would also serve together as our respective country's Permanent Representative in New York simultaneously. Prasad later became Sri Lanka's High Commissioner in New Delhi, Ambassador in the United States and the island country's Foreign Secretary.

During my stay in New Delhi, I tried to keep in touch regularly with a like-minded group of foreign diplomats on the Bhutanese refugees. I used to update them quite regularly and had started to get their sympathy on the issue. This group included the Austrian, Swiss, Dutch and the EU diplomats. I also had good contacts with some Bhutanese refugee leaders and activists who kept visiting New Delhi. At that time, there was little or no discussion with the Indian counterparts on the issue.

Administrative Works

While in New Delhi, I tried to change the working culture and management practices of the Embassy, for which I received good support from Ambassador Thapa and other diplomatic staff. Accordingly, we introduced job descriptions, streamlined the local staff regulations, regularized the calendar of activities, started duty rosters including for airports and other activities and for the embassy staff on weekends and public holidays, reduced misuse or competition for use of long-distance telephone calls and vehicles of the embassy, regularized staff meetings, improved documentation and regularized reporting to the Ministry, and introduced similar reforms that allowed us to work in a less panicky and divisive environment among the staff that used to be there earlier.

There were unachieved things as well. I could not fully relieve the diplomatic staff from routine and non-substantial and trivial matters. I kept encouraging the diplomatic staff to increase their contacts and network, which only a few did well. I could not complete the renovation of the office and the unused portion of the Ambassador's residence, for which I had to ask a government engineer from Kathmandu to fly to do the designs for converting the unused lower floor into two quarters for senior officers with backside access. This plan materialized and two senior embassy staff started to stay there a few years after I left New Delhi. I could not establish the inventory system for Embassy assets and property, for it was quite chaotic. My time and energy also used to be dispensed with such trivial things as registering newly bought vehicles, or getting admission for someone in a college or a school and doing other errands, thus diverting my time and energy from substantive issues.

There were issues like getting permits for the aircrafts hired by the Royal Nepal airlines. It was a shame riding on a JAT aircraft on RA flight. It was quite an embarrassing task to obtain permits for the Yugoslav Airlines to fly to New Delhi under the RA banner. Things had gone really bad with the national flag carrier at that time.

The Embassy in New Delhi had earned its reputation as an outpost and clearing-house of the school and college admissions, facilitations and hospitality service to the visiting VIPs and others for sundry purposes such as tourism, pilgrimage, transit, medical treatment, and personal visits. Changing that was quite a big task, but we tried, thanks to the guidance and leadership of Ambassador Bhekh B Thapa. The Embassy started to be assertive and visible in the substantive issues, though the spirit could not be retained thereafter. I can say I tried to somehow contribute to change the image of the New Delhi mission for its non-performance, waste, and focus on trivial matters to substantive aspects. By the time I was leaving, I had started to see some zeal among some officers to implement reforms and become innovative, some on their own.

I also had to deal with issues related to the problems faced by the Nepali students in India. I managed to convince the Delhi University for admission of the Nepalese students on the basis of our recommendation, in which I found a roundabout wording to say that each of the private applicants to colleges in the university were the nominees of the government. The Delhi University, in its statute, had provisions that allowed the Nepali students in colleges in the first come first serve basis if they were nominated by the government of Nepal. Second Secretary Mr. Bhrigu Dhungana helped me in this case quite well. After that, we did not have to go after Delhi University officials to get individual students, often connected to highly placed officials and leaders in Nepal, admitted in the University's colleges. We could do that by just sending a formatted letter of recommendation.

We could also organize a few tourism promotional events. I was actively involved in organizing a Nepal Night Festival at a local hotel in New Delhi quite successfully. Ambassador Thapa invited senior government officials and politicians, while there were many Indian guests in attendance. I also had the opportunity of speaking in a few

seminars and meetings on bilateral and regional issues. Though I was not a member of the Board of the Nepal-India B P Koirala Foundation, I kept pushing its activities but could only marginally contribute to make it focus on substantive issues than on the occasional exchange of visits and organization of some seminars.

There were instances in which I had to cater to the visiting royals. I had good acquaintance with Crown Prince Deependra who used to frequent to New Delhi for transit and other purposes. Deependra was fond of talking about politics, sports, guns and all sorts of spoiled-brat kind of things with us. In some incidents, we had to wait for hours at the transit lounge looking after the visiting royals. I was disappointed most of the royals I knew then in New Delhi, including Crown Prince Deependra, were killed during the 19 June 2001 massacre at the royal palace in Kathmandu.

My acquaintance with Chakra Prasad Bastola would intensify while I was in New Delhi. He had served as Nepal's ambassador to India and had many friends who I could relate to. Chakra Dai used to keep visiting New Delhi frequently including to see his two daughters studying in different colleges. Through Chakra Dai and Shailaja Acharya, who used to frequent New Delhi, we had developed good relations with Mr. Chandra Shekhar, former Prime Minister of India, and his staff.

Various political leaders used to visit New Delhi on their own and meet many Indian leaders. Some had good connections in the intelligence departments. Some leaders would directly speak to the officials of the Ministry of External Affairs. Others would come for the medical treatment or admission of their children in schools and colleges in India. If the connections they had could be utilized for promoting Nepal's national interests, we could do a lot collectively. Unfortunately, that was not happening.

Two Nepali people with whom I had good contacts during the time were Mr. Niranjana Koirala and Mr. Yubaraj Ghimire. Koirala, who was living in New Delhi with his wife, daughter of an influential businessman called Dalmia, introduced me to his good connections in New Delhi's power elite. Journalist Yuba Raj Ghimire was very helpful in guiding me through connections in the journalistic and political world.

During my stay in New Delhi, I made good trips with my family to Haridwar, Rishikesh, Dehradun, Massourie, Chandigarh, Simla, Mathura, Vrindaban, Agra, Kurukshetra, Jaipur and Vaishnodevi, for which we had to enter the troubled state of Jammu and Kashmir. I drove myself to most of these places. Driving around in a new CD car around India's crowded highways and busy bazaars was quite an experience.

On the overall, I enjoyed working in the Nepali embassy in New Delhi, which I found very useful in my later years in the diplomatic service. I strongly recommend that Nepal's career diplomats must serve at least once in New Delhi in their career. In fact, the Government should adopt a policy that a diplomat must have served in New Delhi before taking up the assignment as Nepal's Foreign Secretary.

Ambassadorial Stint in France (2010-2014)



Mohan Krishna Shrestha

Background

Countries establish diplomatic relations to promote their mutual interests. Friendship, understanding and cooperative attitude constitute the solid foundation of such relations. The history of establishing diplomatic relations and exchange of Ambassadors is an age-old diplomatic activity. Countries, irrespective of their geographical size, establish diplomatic relations to contribute to peace and stability in the world. Diplomatic camaraderie is an inalienable part of the humanity at large.

Holy See, the tiniest country in the world, (also called a micro state), with an area of mere 0.97 sq. kms and a population of 835 persons and all within the Rome city, has established diplomatic relations with 180 countries and they have a total of 180 Embassies (106 Residential and 74 Non-Residential). In many capital cities including Paris, Apostolic Nunciature is the dean of the diplomatic corps.

Nepal-France Relations

Poles apart by varied reasons, Nepal and France relations are based on true friendship, mutual understanding and cooperative spirits. Diplomatic relation between the two countries was established on 20 April 1949. And by now, seventy one years have passed. Our relations are bound by the strand of friendship and mutual understanding at the government and people's levels. Several high level visits have been exchanged between our two countries. One noticeable among such visits is that of late King Birendra to France in 1981 to address the Conference of the Least Developed Countries as the keynote speaker. France was the proud host.

Late French President Francois Mitterrand also paid a two days State visit to Nepal on 2 and 3 May 1983. The decades of 1980s and 1990s were somewhat vibrant with France extending economic and technical cooperation to Nepal. France even wrote off a debt of 100 million Francs to relieve Nepal from debt burden. Moreover, France also sent thousands of tons of wheat to Nepal as a help. However, our relations nosedived with the beginning of 2000s due to paradigm shift in French official development assistance.

Nepal attracted attention of French people from early 19th century. Then, famous Oreintologist Sylvan Levy visited Nepal several times, and he also wrote a book titled "Le Nepal". Thereafter, on 3rd June 1950, late Maurice Herzog scaled Mt. Annapurna at 8,091 meters making a history of a human foot atop a Himalaya exceeding 8 thousand meters. He also wrote a book titled "L'Annapurna" which was translated into several other languages and sold millions of copies. The book was instrumental in introducing Nepal to outside world. Yet as another milestone event, Pierre Mazeaud and Dr. Christian Janin scaled Mt. Everest, the highest peak in the world at 8,848 meters, in 1978 and 1990, respectively, becoming the first French man and woman to do so bringing Nepal to the attention of French mountaineers.

Formidable Task

Soon after reaching Paris to take up my assignment, I found almost everything in a bad situation. Ambassador's residence, Embassy chancery and other paraphernalia were in a wretched condition. Absence of Ambassador for six years in two instalments, perhaps, might be the cause of such situation. One day, we were invited by Pakistani Ambassador for dinner. At the gate of the residence, one driver came to salute me and said, 'Sir, now you have come, please repair the house urgently because the house is the talk of the town although it is located in a famous quarter of Paris.' I was dumbfounded to hear such comments and concerns from a driver of a friendly country. I found curiosity among the Nepali brethren and French friends of Nepal as how the Ambassador will proceed to level up our bilateral relation which was, indeed, at its nadir.

Getting a tip from Mr. Paul Ortiz, (now deceased) formerly Presidential counselor on Foreign Affairs who earlier served as the Director of Asian Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we organized a program on 4 October 2010 to fete late Maurice Herzog for his outstanding feat. Late Herzog and his wife Sisi were most satisfied with our encomium. Although it was a simple program, no doubt, it carried a big message. Next, we also organized a program on 15 November 2010 to fete Mazeau and Janin. Both of them made good remarks about Nepal and Nepali people.

Actions

To begin with, we took prompt actions to render unbiased and prompt services, upped budgetary levels, and purchased a new flag car. The Embassy also maintained excellent relations with French MoFA, made interaction programs with French professors, academicians and researchers, renewed friendship with French friends of Nepal, old and new, as well as with French NGOs involved in activities in Nepal. We also nurtured and strengthened relations with foreign Ambassadors and other diplomatic friends. Our wining and dining diplomacy was instrumental to foster good relations in this regard. Rumours spread about our scrumptious Nepali food served on such occasions.

We also helped Nepali businessmen visiting France, maintained good liaison with Non-Resident Nepali Association, other organizations and Nepali community including participation in their programs. We maintained excellent relations with Nepali students and extended cooperation. The Embassy hosted a program on 14 April 2013 in Cite University, twice nominated for Nobel Peace Prize. It was a huge success. We also celebrated Republic Day. On one such occasion, French MoFA representative Jean Romnicanu said it took 182 years for France to solidify democracy.

We also celebrated Vijaya Dashami and Teej with much public participation. In January 2014, we hosted a meeting of our Honorary Consuls under the countries of accreditation for the promotion of Nepal in their respective countries. Positive actions in all fronts brought public support and cooperation to the Embassy.

I am very pleased to cite here an example of the love and affection of the French people to Nepal. Mayor Alan Scudellaro of Lamothe-goas and his wife are avid lovers of Nepal. This small city lies about 1000 kms in Southern France. They have adopted a Nepali boy and also established a NGO called Gers Himalayan Association. Since years, GHA has been providing cooperation to a school in Dhading district. He said, they raise chicken to produce eggs and buffalo for milk to provide to the students. Each year around April, a group of people from this city visit Nepal and extend cooperation to the students. Hearing such level of affection, I was, indeed, very much impressed.

Moreover, on 10 November 2010, GHA celebrated their 10th year of establishment and we also attended. We saw many people there including Deputies from neighboring province of Florence. Similarly, Lorrain Nepal and Nepal et Vous are also very active NGOs. They raise money to extend help to Nepali village students. There are also many other French NGOs which provide cooperation to the poor students in the villages making school buildings, providing text books and the construction of dispensary as well.

Promotional Programs

Our next actions centred on the hosting of Nepal promotional programs in Paris and outside. France hosts about 83 million tourists a year making it the number one tourist importing country in the world. About 28 to 30 thousand French tourists visit Nepal each year and there exists an immense possibility to invite more tourists from France. Tourism, indeed, is the most prominent business activity which accrues direct and immediate benefit to the economy. But, it is rather difficult to host programs in an expensive city like Paris with exiguous budgetary resources. However, we hosted several promotional programs in Paris and outside Paris with cooperation from the local authorities. They too, were, very happy to extend cooperation to the Embassy as we found.

Finding non-stop activities of the Embassy, on one occasion, French MoFA Deputy Director Madam Veronique Roger Lacan expressed the happiness of the French Government and said that our bilateral relations are being nursed back to health with the strenuous efforts of the Embassy and in particular, that of the Ambassador.

Besides, with cooperation from the Mayor of 17th Arrondissement, Mme. Brigitte Kuster, the Embassy organized programs on 22 April 2011 and 19 April 2013 to commemorate the 62nd and 64th Anniversaries of our diplomatic relations. The programs were huge success. All appreciated our Nepali food and display of exportable produces including handicrafts. On 8 July 2011, yet another successful program was organized in Chamounix, a scenic city in the lap of Mt. Alps. Mayor Eric Fourier and his staff provided requisite cooperation to the Embassy. Their excellent courtesy included tickets to ride on the world famous steep cable car built in 1953 next morning.

Mayor Fournier is an avid Nepal lover. At the program he said that Nepal is naturally beautiful and once is not enough to visit the place, and once is not enough to see the place, and he repeated his visit to Nepal soon after. The Embassy hosted another program in Thionville, a border city between France and Luxembourg with cooperation from Mayor Bertrand Metz. The program was very successful like others in the past. A Nepali restaurant entrepreneur Bal Krishna Sapkota, living in Luxembourg, helped the Embassy as much possible. Such programs, indeed, leave a big impact in the minds of French guests where old renew their affiliation with Nepal nostalgically and new stirring a desire to visit. On our part, we could also save money which are absolutely necessary to host the programs. Such programs, therefore are, mutually reinforcing to make our bilateral relations stronger at the peoples' level.

Relations with UNESCO

Nepal joined UNESCO on 1st May 1953, earlier than the United Nations. Now, this world organization has become a place where learned men and women come from different parts of the globe to give lectures on world peace, humanity and other aspects. Since its establishment, UNESCO has excelled in its pious objectives to better education, scientific and cultural areas through its multifarious activities. Moreover, lately, UNESCO has embarked for promoting other areas like women's empowerment, girl child education, gender equality and water resources issues which has great impact on the lives of the people. I presented my Credential as Permanent Delegate of Nepal to UNESCO Director General on 1st September 2011 and involved in the activities of UNESO as much as possible.

Generally, it is found that UNESCO and Nepal have maintained a very good bilateral relations and this world body has been extending possible cooperation to Nepal in the fields of education, science and culture, including the development of Lumbini. UNESCO has endorsed 4 world heritage sites and 7 monumental zones in Nepal.

The year 2013 was a special year. As such, the Embassy together with Nepal National Commission for UNESCO published a special publication to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of Nepal's membership. Under Secretary Mr. Dhruva Raj Regmi worked tirelessly for this purpose. To further perpetuate the everlasting friendship between Nepal and UNESCO, I recommended to our Government to offer a statue of Lord Buddha as a donation. It was placed in UNESCO lobby on 22 June 2015. It was my seminal idea to perpetuate the name of Lumbini as the legitimate birthplace of Lord Buddha. Thousands of people visit UNESCO headquarters each day and they will not miss to see the beautiful statue.

Same years, we also got victorious at the election for a seat in the Executive Board of UNESCO for 2013-2017. I remember the words of Philippine Ambassador Madame Christina Ortega who said, the results of the election to their candidature to the World Heritage Committee will decide her fate as Ambassador.

To win in election, official and personal diplomacy needs to be well oiled. Personal meetings, wining and dining become absolutely necessary to present one's case. When I requested El Salvador Ambassador/Permanent Representative Madame Pool for support, she retorted that not only her country but all countries from her region will be voting to support us. It was, indeed, a noteworthy success of personal diplomacy.

7 November 2013, the election day, election campaign reached feverish pitch and countries were requesting support to their candidacy even in the last moment. Results came and Nepal bagged 142 votes out of 179 votes cast and got elected for 2013-2017 period. China, Japan and India who are sarcastically called permanent members, of course, got re-elected. Vanuatu, a Pacific island country created some chaos and troubles, but their attempt failed.

Repair of Residence

The residence of Ambassador located at 7, Rue Alberic Magnard in the 16th Arrondissement was purchased on 3rd July 1979. But, the building was lying unrepaired for a long time and it was in a horrible condition needing urgent and total repair. Several cosmetic repairs have caused large sums in the past. Even insurance company refused to renew the insurance of the house in 2010. Knowledgeable people say how difficult and expensive it is, in a city like Paris, to repair an old building with water in the ceilings. However, we proceeded to repair the building with a strong and determined will supported by some budget. Once repair works were finished after almost six months, this 135-year old building appeared in a new and fresh avatar. People who earlier have stayed in the building could not believe their eyes that this building could appear in such a new form. But truth is truth and I am very happy to say that a precious building like this is saved enhancing our national prestige. Many Ambassadors who

came to attend our programs in our residence praised the ambience and decorations. An air of Nepal filled everywhere in the building and sumptuous Nepali food added more flavour.

Trade and Investment

In trade also, Nepal can do a lot in future as our skilled people are producing more and more new products. Natural ingredients and bio-diversity produces might have a great market potentiality. Our enormous hydropower capacity needs to be exploited in which French companies can help a lot. The effective implementation of the economic diplomacy with well run programs might play a catalytic role in enhancing economic potential of the country. In this age of globalization, countries which would enhance their comparative advantages and competitive edge would prevail. There is no shortage of FDI, if we know how to lure it. An amiable business environment in the country would usher in a new era of global business relations for mutual benefit. World Trade Organization inspires ruled based, free and fair trade. Such environment, indeed, will motivate countries to engage in a mutually beneficial trade practices.

Nepal and France maintain trade relations since long ago. Exports and imports figures used to hover around 1.24 billion rupees for several years. However, since last few years, Nepal's imports from France have grown tremendously. Nepal exports to France mainly primary and tertiary goods like handicrafts, woollen carpets, pashmina produces, paper and paper products, incense and other goods. Similarly, Nepal imports from France mainly industrial goods, machineries, chemicals, helicopters and airplanes. Lately, Nepal has purchased many helicopters as well as Airbus 320 and 330-200 series planes totalling number 4. These cost millions of dollars and Nepal paid for these. French companies bagged tenders to print Machine Readable Passport (MRP) and now, yet another project to print ID cards. It seems, France is renewing its interest to do business with Nepal. Actually, trade is the lifeline of a country and needs to be promoted than aid.

Relations with Accredited Countries

Our resident Embassy in Paris was also accredited to Greece, Monaco, Portugal and Spain. About 20 thousand Nepalese are living in these countries altogether. Naturally, they face many consular problems. We always maintained good relations with diplomats from those countries as well as with Nepalese communities, NRNA and others. I visited those countries during the presentation of credentials and at other times to make interactions with the people there to alleviate their sufferings. We also took effective measures to solve the outstanding problems being faced by the people with regard to the passports and other consular problems. Moreover, we also hosted Nepal promotion program in Lisbon on 8 July 2012 and in Barcelona on 19 May 2013 and 6 June 2014 with cooperation from Non-resident Nepalis' Association

and Honorary Consul Office in Barcelona. These programs were successful to introduce Nepal to the Portuguese and Spanish peoples. Such joint cooperation could mitigate the costs required for hosting the program with same level of results.

Future Prospects

It is really gratifying to note that there exists a reservoir of goodwill and affection for Nepal and Nepali people not only in France but also in all the countries of our concurrent accreditation. Alan Garcia is a Portuguese national who has had scaled all mountains above 8 thousand meters. He said when he first visited Nepal about 40 years ago, he was stunned to see a signboard which said "You cannot change Nepal, but Nepal will change you". Ever since, he has been visiting Nepal almost every year, with insatiable desire for revisit.

Similarly, Honorary consul in Barcelona Mr. Lluís Belvis had visited Nepal 118 times, probably, highest in number by any foreigner. The Himalayas in the northern part of the country, formed some 50.4 million years ago, are a great source of attraction to the alpinists from all over the world. Similarly, many other aspects including the way of the life of the people are also a source of interest to the visitors. With well-orchestrated programs, Nepal can invite more and more tourists from all over the world. We, therefore, need to redouble our efforts to revive our tourism industry at best.

There is a huge prospect for developing bilateral relations between Nepal and France at many aspects, in particular, trade, tourism, investment and in socio-economic sectors. Similarly, there also exists huge potentiality for developing relations between Nepal and Greece, Portugal and Spain. Now, we have established an Embassy in Spain also. Specially, young Spaniards love Nepal and are excited to visit. The unchanging truth is that people in France as well as in above-mentioned countries hold affection towards our country and people for varied reasons.

विदेशमा नेपाली श्रमिकहरूको सुरक्षाको प्रश्न र मलेशियाको मेरो अनुभव



डा. निरञ्जन मान सिंह बस्न्यात

पृष्ठभूमि:

कुनै पनि मुलुकको परराष्ट्र नीति त्यस देशको राष्ट्रिय हितसँग सम्बद्ध हुन्छ । त्यसका साथै परराष्ट्र नीति उक्त मुलुक संसारको भूगोलमा कहाँ अवस्थित छ, प्रमुख छिमेकी राष्ट्रहरू कुन कुन छन् तथा राजनैतिक तथा आर्थिक सम्बन्ध गाँसिएका अन्य मुलुकहरूसँगको सम्बन्धमा आफ्नो राष्ट्रको राष्ट्रिय स्वार्थ कसरी प्रवर्द्धन र विकास गर्दै लैजान सकिन्छ, यी कुराहरूबाट नै निर्देशित हुन्छ । यस विषयमा हाम्रो नेपालको संविधानले पनि स्पष्ट रूपमा व्याख्या गरेको छ ।

वर्तमान संविधानमा राष्ट्रका नीतिहरू अन्तर्गत धारा ५१ को उपधारा (ड) मा अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय सम्बन्धसम्बन्धी नीति बारे निम्नलिखित कुरा उल्लेख छ:

- "१. नेपालको सर्वाधिकार सत्ता, भौगोलिक अखण्डता, स्वाधीनता र राष्ट्रिय हितको रक्षा गर्न क्रियाशील रहदै संयुक्त राष्ट्रसंघको बडापत्र, असंलग्नता, पञ्चशीलको सिद्धान्त, अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय कानून र विश्वशान्तिको मान्यताका आधारमा राष्ट्रको सर्वोपरी हितलाई ध्यानमा राखी स्वतन्त्र परराष्ट्र नीति सञ्चालन गर्ने ।
२. विगतमा भएका सन्धिहरूको पुनरावलोकन गर्दै समानता र पारस्परिक हितको आधारमा सन्धि सम्झौताहरू गर्ने ।"

यसका साथै नेपाल लगायत संयुक्त राष्ट्र संघका १९३ सदस्य राष्ट्रहरूले अनुमोदन गरेका भियना महासन्धिहरूमा पनि आफ्नो मुलुकको हितको प्रवर्द्धन र त्यस देशमा रहेका आफ्ना नागरिकहरूको सुरक्षा गर्नु अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय सम्बन्धको मूल उद्देश्य भएको उल्लेख छ । सन् १९६१ को कुटनैतिक सम्बन्ध तथा सन् १९६३ को कन्सुलर सम्बन्ध विषयका यी दुई महासन्धिहरूमा यी कुराहरू स्पष्ट उल्लेख छन् ।

त्यसैगरी सम्बिधानको धारा ५२ मा यी कुराहरुलाई राज्यको दायित्वको रूपमा उल्लेख गरिएको छ । राज्यका नीतिहरू कार्यान्वयनका विषयमा संसदमा प्रतिवेदन पेश गर्नुपर्ने व्यवस्था पनि छ । यसका साथ साथै धारा ५१ कै उपधारा (झ) मा श्रम तथा रोजगारी सम्बन्धी नीति पनि उल्लेख गरी सोही उपधाराको बुदाँ नं. ५ मा "वैदेशिक रोजगारीलाई शोषणमुक्त, सुरक्षित र व्यवस्थित गर्न तथा श्रमिकको रोजगारी र अधिकारको प्रत्याभूति गर्न यस क्षेत्रको नियमन र व्यवस्थापन गर्ने" तथा बुँदा नं. ६ मा "वैदेशिक रोजगारीबाट आर्जन भएको पूँजी, सीप, प्रविधि र अनुभवलाई स्वदेशमा उत्पादनमूलक क्षेत्रमा लगाउन प्रोत्साहन गर्ने" भन्ने पनि स्पष्ट रूपमा उल्लेख छ ।

माथि उल्लेखित संवैधानिक प्रावधानहरूमा राम्रोसँग व्याख्या गरिएको हुनाले नेपालको परराष्ट्र नीति के कुराहरूमा आधारित छ र त्यसलाई कसरी कार्यान्वयन गर्ने भन्ने कुरामा कुनै द्विविधा हुनु पर्ने देखिँदैन । खासगरी यो लेख वैदेशिक रोजगारीको विषयमा केन्द्रित भएको परिप्रेक्षमा यसमा विदेशमा लाखौंको संख्यामा रहेका हाम्रा युवा श्रमिकहरूलाई संरक्षण र सुरक्षा प्रदान गरी देशको आर्थिक विकासमा प्राप्त हुने पुँजी अर्थात विप्रेषणलाई कसरी सदुपयोग गर्ने भन्ने विषयमा छलफल गर्ने प्रयास गरिएको छ ।

राजदूतावासका मुख्य कामहरूमा दुवै देशका आपसी हितको प्रवर्द्धन गर्ने, आफ्ना नागरिकहरूलाई सुरक्षाको प्रत्याभूति गर्ने, सन्धि संझौता गर्ने, दुवै देशका निजी क्षेत्रका बीचमा व्यापार तथा पर्यटन प्रवर्द्धन गर्ने गरी आर्थिक कुटनीति अन्तरगत आपसी फाइदा हुने काम अगाडि बढाउनु नै हो ।

वैदेशिक रोजगारमा देश भित्रको अबस्था:

आफ्नो कार्यस्थल भएको मुलुकमा जानुभन्दा अगाडि नेपाली श्रमिकहरूले नेपालभित्र केही प्रक्रियाहरू पूरा गर्नु पर्ने हुन्छ । सोही अनुसार वैदेशिक रोजगार कम्पनीले गरेको विज्ञापनको आधारमा आवेदन दिई तोकिएको शुल्क उक्त कम्पनीलाई बुझाई केही समय कुरेपछि सम्बन्धित मुलुकबाट भिसा प्राप्त हुन्छ । वि.सं. २०६९ सालमा सरकारले शुल्कको रूपमा प्रत्येक श्रमिकबाट रु. ८० हजार उठाउन सक्ने निर्णय गरेको थियो । त्यसमा एक तर्फी हवाई टिकटको खर्च पनि समावेश थियो । शुल्क रु ८० हजार भएता पनि वैदेशिक रोजगार कम्पनीहरूले श्रमिकले पाउने कामको तलब स्तर हेरी एक जनाबाट रु एक लाख ५० हजार देखि रु दुई लाख सम्म निरन्तर उठाइरहेका थिए; कुनै नियमन र नियन्त्रण थिएन । त्यसै गरी श्री टेकबहादुर गुरुङ श्रम तथा रोजगार मन्त्री भएपछि उहाँले मन्त्रपरिषदमा प्रस्ताव लगी वैदेशिक रोजगार कम्पनीहरूले अब न्यूनतम शुल्क प्रति श्रमिक रु १० हजार (हवाई टिकट बाहेक) मात्र उठाउन पाउने निर्णय गराउनु भयो । यो निर्णय एकदम सकारात्मक र श्रमिकलाई फाइदा हुने खालको थियो । त्यसबाट वाहीवाही पाएर मन्त्रीज्यू खुबै लोकप्रिय पनि हुनु भयो सामाजिक संजालमा । तर त्यसको केही समयपछि भने कम्पनीहरूले रु १० हजारको रसिद दिने तर रु एक लाख देखि रु दुई लाखसम्म शुल्क असुल्ने गरिरहेको पाइयो र वैदेशिक रोजगार कम्पनीहरूबाट श्रमिक झनै शोषित हुन पुगे । सरकारबाट कुनै नियन्त्रण र नियमन हुन सकेन । वैदेशिक रोजगार कम्पनीहरूको यस्तो शोषणको विरोध गरी पटक पटक मासिक

प्रतिवेदनमा यो शोषण रोकन मैले अनुरोध गरी परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयका साथै श्रम तथा रोजगार मन्त्रालयमा पत्र पठाएको थिएँ । यसको कुनै सुनुवाई आजसम्म भएको छैन । यसको विरोध गर्नुको मुख्य तात्पर्य के थियो भने काठमाडौँमा नै धेरै पैसा बुझाएर विदेश काम गर्न आएपछि तलवबाट वचत गरी त्यो ऋण तिर्न करिब आठ महिनादेखि एक वर्षम्म लाग्दथ्यो र यसले श्रमिकलाई मात्र होइन परिवारका सबैलाई मानसिक तनाव हुन्थ्यो । नराम्रो र खराब कम्पनी पर्ने कति श्रमिकले यही तनावबाट मानसिक सन्तुलन गुमाउन पुगेका थिए भने कसैले आत्महत्यासम्म गरेका थिए । तर पटक पटक मैले गरेको अनुरोधलाई सरकारले आँखा चिम्लिएको अवस्था भयो र आजसम्म पनि रु १० हजारको निर्णय फिर्ता भएको छैन र श्रमिक नेपाल मै ठगिने कार्यको निरन्तरता कायम नै छ । आजको मितिसम्म यसमा सुधार भएको छैन । यसरी रु. १० हजार भन्दा बढी उठाएको रकम कानूनतः "कालो धन" हुनु पर्ने हो तर यसमा नियन्त्रण र नियमन पटकै नभएको अवस्था विद्यमान छ ।

किन यस्तो भयो भन्ने कुरा मैले भनिरहनै पर्दैन किन भने बैदेशिक रोजगार कम्पनीहरूले गरेको आर्थिक शोषणबाट अधिकांश राजनैतिक दलका कार्यकर्ता र नेताहरूले समेत अनुचित फाइदा लिइरहेकै छन् । चुनावको बेला ठूला रोजगार कम्पनीहरूले उम्मेदवारहरूलाई निर्वाचन खर्च दिने गरेको कुरा लाटोले पनि नबुझ्ने कुरो भएन । सायद पुँजीवादी व्यवस्था भनेको आखिर यही नै होला, किनभने एउटा वर्गले अर्को वर्गको शोषण गर्नु पुँजीवादमा सामान्य कुरो नै भयो ।

रु १० हजार भन्दा बढी गैर कानुनी रूपमा उठाइरहेको अवस्थालाई सुधार गरी शोषणलाई न्यूनीकरण गर्न सबै श्रमिक गन्तव्य मुलुकहरूमा कार्यरत राजदूतहरूको सम्मेलन काठमाडौँमा आयोजना गर्ने तथा त्यस सम्मेलनमा बैदेशिक रोजगारसँग सम्बद्ध सबै सरोकारवाला मन्त्रालय तथा सरकारी कार्यालयका प्रमुखहरूले भाग लिई उक्त सम्मेलनले एउटा उपयुक्त रकम वैदेशिक रोजगार कम्पनीले उठाउन पाउने व्यवस्था गरी निर्णय गर्नु पर्ने मेरो प्रस्ताव थियो । यसले गर्दा श्रमिकहरू शोषणमा पर्नु नपर्ने भन्ने उदेश्य थियो । तत्पश्चात सरकारबाट कडा नियमनको व्यवस्था हुनु पर्ने पनि मेरो सुझाव थियो । वैदेशिक रोजगार कम्पनीहरूले पनि सो शुल्क श्रमिकको एक महिनाको तलव वरावर हुनु पर्ने माग हालसम्म पनि गरिरहेका छन् ।

मलेशिया सरकारबाट भिसा शुल्क बृद्धि:

सन् २०१३ को नोभेम्बरसम्म जम्मा रु ७०० मात्र भिसा शुल्क लिइरहेको काठमाडौँस्थित मलेशियन दूतावासले भिसा शुल्क बढाउँदै लगी १५ सेप्टेम्बर २०१६ सम्म आइपुग्दा प्रत्येक श्रमिकको रु १७ हजार ८ सय पुर्याएको छ । मलेशिया भ्रमणमा जाने गैर श्रमिक पर्यटकले पनि त्यति नै भिसा शुल्क बुझाउनु पर्ने भएको छ । नेपाली दूतावास क्वालालम्पुरबाट परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयको निर्देशन पनि प्राप्त भएकोले भिसा शुल्क बढेकोमा मलेशिया सरकार समक्ष कडा गुनासो गर्ने काम भयो । एउटै विषयमा विभिन्न मितिमा चारवटा नोट भर्बल (सरकारी पत्र) मलेशिया सरकारलाई लेखे काम पनि भयो तर मलेशिया सरकार भिसा शुल्क घटाउनेतर्फ टसमस भएन । मलेशिया सरकारले पत्रहरूको जवाफसम्म पनि पठाउन आवश्यक ठानेन ।

भिसा शुल्कको बढोत्तरी कसरी भयो भने पासपोर्टको भिसा स्टिकरमा जम्मा रु ७ सय मात्र उल्लेख भएको, VLN Malaysia को handling charge भनेर रु ३ हजार २ सय, One stop Centre भनेर शुल्क रु २ हजार ८ सय तथा अर्को बहानामा Immigration security clearance भनेर रु ३ हजार दुई सय र MIGRAMS भन्ने कम्पनीले प्रत्येक श्रमिकबाट अमेरिकी डलर ३० बराबरको रु ३ हजार तीन सय उठाएको थियो । सेप्टेम्बर २०१६ मा यो जम्मा अमेरिकी डलर १८० अर्थात् रु १७ हजार ८ सय पुग्यो । अहिले पनि यो प्रणाली नै कायम छ ।

यस विषयमा मलेशिया सरकारको उच्च तह अर्थात् तत्कालीन गृह उप मन्त्री दातुक नुर जज्लान वीन महम्मदलाई मैले ८ डिसेम्बर २०१६ मा भेटी भिसा शुल्क घटाउन अनुरोध गर्दा उहाँले बुझेर खबर गर्ने कुरा गरेर त्यसपछि कुनै वास्ता गर्नु भएन । त्यसमा नेपालका उच्च राजनैतिक तहका व्यक्तिहरू तथा स्वास्थ्य परीक्षणमा संलग्न व्यक्तिहरूका साथै मलेशिया सरकारका केही व्यक्तिहरू तथा कम्पनी एजेन्टहरूको संलग्नता देखिएको थियो । नेपाल सरकारले यस विषयमा कारवाही गर्न सक्रियता देखाएन । अहिलेसम्म पनि यही स्थिति कायमै छ, तर यसै प्रसंगमा मलेशियामा भ्रष्टाचारको आरोप लागेका भू. पू. प्रधानमन्त्री नजीव रजाकको समयका उप-प्रधान मन्त्री तथा गृहमन्त्री डा. अहमद जाहिद हमिदीलाई भ्रष्टाचारका ४७ वटा आरोप लागेकोमा एउटा आरोप नेपाली श्रमिकको पैसा अनाधिकृत रूपमा उठाई खाएको भन्ने पनि थियो । उहाँमाथि हालसम्म पनि अदालतमा मुद्दा चलिरहेको छ । मलेशिया सरकारको नीति पनि त्यति स्पष्ट देखिएन किनभने पासपोर्टमा लाग्ने भिसा स्टिकरमा भिसा शुल्क रु ७ सय मात्र देखिनेहुनाले सो रकम मात्र मलेशिया सरकारको ढुकुटीमा जान्छ भन्ने स्पष्ट नै छ । तर त्यस बाहेकको पैसा कहाँ जान्छ भन्ने स्पष्ट छैन । अनुसन्धान गर्दा त्यसभन्दा बाहेक उठेको पैसा हडकडको एउटा बैंकको एउटा मलेशियन कम्पनीको खातामा जम्मा भएको पाइयो । माथि उल्लेख भए बमोजिम दुवै पक्षका व्यक्तिहरूले वाँडिचुडी खाने गरेको स्पष्ट नै हुन आउँछ । जब सरकारहरूद्वारा नै भ्रष्टाचार नियन्त्रणमा ध्यान दिइँदैन र उल्टो त्यस्तो काम गर्नेहरूलाई संरक्षण गर्ने कार्यले प्रश्रय पाउँछ भने यस्तो अवस्थामा एउटा दूतावास अथवा राजदूतले मात्र केही सकारात्मक काम गर्छु भनी लागेर केही गर्ने र भन्ने कुरा सोचन पनि सकिन्न ।

मलेशियामा श्रमिकका अन्य समस्याहरू:

मलेशियामा श्रमिकहरू पठाउने ८ वटा मुख्य श्रोत मूलुकहरूमा क्रमशः इण्डोनेशिया, नेपाल, बंगलादेश, फिलिफिन्स, म्यानमार, पाकिस्तान, भारत र थाइल्याण्ड हुन् । सबै श्रोत मूलुकहरूबाट गरी त्यहाँ जम्मा ६० लाख विदेशी श्रमिकहरू भएको अनुमान गरिएको छ ।

स्वास्थ्य: मलेशिया गइसकेपछि कस्तो कम्पनी पर्छ अर्थात् असल या खराब त्यसमा त्यस कम्पनीले दिने स्वास्थ्य लगायत अन्य सुविधाहरूमा पनि फरक पर्छ । राम्रो कम्पनी परेमा नियमित स्वास्थ्य परीक्षण गर्ने व्यवस्था तथा होस्टलमा बस्ने व्यवस्था पनि राम्रो हुन्छ तथा अन्य कम्पनी भन्दा मासिक तलब पनि केही राम्रो हुन्छ । सुरक्षागार्ड भएमा मलेशिया रिड्गीट १६ सय देखि २२ सयसम्म हुन्छ भने साधारण फ्याक्ट्री अथवा उत्पादन गर्ने कम्पनीमा काम गर्ने श्रमिक भए ११ सय

देखि १५ सयसम्म हुन सक्छ । सुरक्षागार्डको काम केही गाह्रो हुन्छ किनभने दुई सिफ्ट गरी १ जनालाई १२/१२ घण्टाको काम हुन्छ । १२ घण्टा अधिकांश समय उभिएर बस्नुपर्ने भएकोले गाह्रो हुन्छ भन्ने सबै सम्बन्धितको भनाई छ । धेरै कम्पनीहरूले कम्पनी कम्पाउण्डभित्र मेडिकल डाक्टर नराखे र एउटा डिस्पेन्सरीमा केही औषधीहरू राखेर बस्ने गरेको पाइन्छ । कुनै कामदार बिरामी परे त्यही स्वास्थ्य सहायकले दिएको औषधी खाएर बस्नु पर्ने र धेरै बिरामी हुँदा पनि कम्पनीको धेरै पैसा खर्च हुन्छ भन्ने डरले अस्पताल भर्ना नगर्ने गरेको देखियो । श्रमिकको बीमा १२ घण्टाको मात्र हुने गरेको छ । होस्टेलमा १० जना देखि ३० जनासम्म एउटै कोठामा बस्नुपर्ने र ट्वाईलेट तथा नुहाउने पानीको समस्या हुने गरेको पनि देखियो । मलेशिया नेपालभन्दा गर्मी मौसम भएको मुलुक भएकोले प्रतिदिन ननुहाएमा रोग लाग्न सक्ने सम्भावना पनि छँदैछ ।

नेपाली श्रमिकहरू प्रति राम्रो काम गर्ने र इमान्दार भनी प्रशंसा गरे पनि बेलुका रक्सी खाई आपसमा झगडा गर्ने भन्ने मलेशियाई नागरीकहरूको आम गुनासो पनि नरहेको होइन । धेरै रक्सी खाई डिहाइड्रेसन भई तथा मानसिक तनावका कारणबाट राती सुत्दा मृत्यु भएका घटनाहरू पनि धेरै भएकोले नेपालबाट डाक्टरहरूको टोली बोलाई राती सुत्दा अकस्मात हृदयघात भई मृत्यु हुने कारण पत्ता लगाउने प्रयत्न पनि गरिएको थियो । राजदूतावासको तर्फबाट स्वास्थ्य तथा जनसंख्या मन्त्रालयमा पत्राचार गरी डा. केदार प्रसाद बराल र डा. रामेश कोइरालाको टोलीले यसरी मृत्यु भएका नेपाली युवाहरूको पोष्टमार्टम प्रतिवेदन अध्ययन गरेको थियो । साथै, मलाया विश्वविद्यालयका डा.चान सँग पनि सम्पर्कमा रही अध्ययन भएको थियो । त्यस अध्ययनबाट मृत्युदर (राती अकस्मात हृदयघातबाट हुने) घटाउन मद्दत हुने अपेक्षा गरिएको थियो । मलेशियामा प्रतिवर्ष नेपाली श्रमिकको मृत्यु हुने संख्या ३०० देखि ४०० सम्म छ र त्यसमध्ये ७० प्रतिशत राती निन्द्रामा हृदयघातबाट नै हुने गरेको छ ।

औद्योगिक दुर्घटना: विभिन्न समानहरू उत्पादन गर्दा फ्याक्ट्रीमा विभिन्न स्थानमा वसी काम गर्नु पर्ने हुँदा दुर्घटनाहरू पनि हुने गरेको पाइन्छ । कसैको हात खुट्टा आगोले पोलेको तथा मेसिनले हातखुट्टा काटिने धेरै पाइएको छ । राम्रो तालिम नदिई जोखिमपूर्ण काममा लगाउँदा पनि त्यस्तो भएको छ । दुर्घटना भएमा पनि क्षतिपूर्ति रकम धेरै कम रहेको छ । दुर्घटना वा मृत्यु भएको मा पनि क्षतिपूर्ति लिन करिब एक वर्षदेखि तीन वर्षसम्म समय लागेको पाइन्छ । बिजुली बत्ती बालेको र होस्टेल भाडा पनि तलवबाट कट्टी गरी लिन गरिएकोमा सन् २०१८ को जनवरीदेखि कम्पनीले नै उक्त लेवी तिनुपर्ने मलेशिया सरकारले निर्णय गरेको छ । त्यसबाट नेपाली श्रमिकलाई केही राहत भएको छ तर खाना खर्च आफैले तिर्नुपर्ने व्यवस्था छ ।

सडक दुर्घटना: फ्लाई ओभर प्रयोग नगरी हाइवेमा वाटो काट्दा दुर्घटनाहरू भई मृत्यु हुनेको संख्या पनि उल्लेख्य मात्रामा पाइन्छ ।

नेपालीहरूबाट नै श्रमिकमाथि शोषण: पहिले आफू सुरक्षागार्ड अथवा श्रमिक भई मलेशिया गएका केही नेपालीहरूले मलेशिया भाषा पनि बोल्ने र मलेशियन कम्पनीहरूमा नयाँ नेपालीहरूको माग पूर्ति गर्ने नाममा नेपालमा कम्पनी दर्ता गराउने गरेको पाइन्छ । त्यसरी नै उनीहरू मलेशियन कम्पनीको एजेन्ट भई लामो समयको भिसा प्राप्त गरेका छन् । क्वालालम्पुर र अन्य सहरमा मलेशियन नागरिकहरूसँग मिली कम्पनी खोल्ने र नयाँ आउने नेपालीहरूलाई विभिन्न बहाना बनाई ठगी गर्ने कार्य पनि प्रशस्तै भेटिन्छ । त्यहाँ नेपालीहरूका झण्डै ४०/५० वटा राजनैतिक, सामाजिक, जातीय आदि संस्था तथा संगठन खोलिएको पाइन्छ । ती संगठनहरूको नेतृत्व अधिकांश यिनै नेपालीहरूको हातमा छ । यी संस्थामा श्रमिकहरूलाई सदस्य बनाई पैसा उठाउने गरिन्छ । हरेक वर्ष महाअधिवेशन आयोजना गर्ने तथा सो कार्यक्रममा नेपालबाट नेताहरूलाई हवाई टिकट, होटेल व्यवस्थालगायतका सम्पूर्ण खर्च आफ्नै संस्थाको खर्चबाट व्यहोर्ने गरी बोलाउने गर्दछन् । तर यी संस्थाले फाट्टफुट्ट बाहेक अधिकांश समय नेपाली कामदारहरूको पक्ष लिएको देखिँदैन । कसैकसैले त नेपाली श्रमिक आपूर्ति गर्ने र काम खोजिदिन्छु भनी पैसा खाइदिने तर काम नगरिदिने हुनाले नेपाली कै शोषण गरी प्रशस्त पैसा कमाएको पनि पाइन्छ । राजदूतावासले त्यस्ता व्यक्तिलाई नियन्त्रण गर्न धेरै नै गाह्रो छ किनभने उनीहरूले मलेशियाका नेता, प्रहरीदेखि नेपालमा नेताहरूसँग र उच्च पदस्थ व्यक्तिहरूसँग राम्रो सम्बन्ध कायम गरेकाले कहिलेकाहीं नेपाली राजदूतावासका स्थानीय कर्मचारी, कूटनीतिक कर्मचारी तथा राजदूतसमेतलाई धम्की दिन बाँकी राख्दैनन् । मेरो विचारमा यस्ता प्रकारका समस्याहरू सबै श्रमिक गन्तव्य मुलुकका नेपाली दूतावासहरूले झेलनु पर्ने साझा समस्या नै हुन् ।

मलेशियामा अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय सँघ सङ्गठन र मलेशियाली निजी क्षेत्रका कम्पनीहरूमा काम गर्ने तथा उच्च शिक्षा अध्ययन गर्न गएका नेपालीहरूको संख्या धेरै न्यून छ । एउटा अनुमान अनुसार यस्ता नेपालीको संख्या २ सयभन्दा कम नै छ ।

हत्या-हिंसा: नेपाली श्रमिकहरूलाई स्थानीय गुन्डाहरूले तलव भर्खर बुझेको समयमा पैसा लुट्ने, पिट्ने र हत्या गर्ने आदि घटनाहरू पनि प्रशस्तै हुने गरेका छन् । साथै कम्पनी मालिकहरूले काम गर्न ढिलो गरेमा अथवा नमानेमा भौतिक तथा मानसिक यातना दिने गरेको पनि पाइन्छ । कम्पनी कम्पाउण्डमा करेन्ट लगाई यातना दिएको समेत पाइएको छ ।

मेरो कार्यकालमा भएका सकारात्मक कार्यहरू:

२२ कात्तिक २०७० सालमा कार्यभार सम्हाल्न म क्वालालम्पुर पुगे र त्यसको दुई महिनापछि पौष २३ गते मलेशियाका राजा अब्दुल हलिम समक्ष आफ्नो ओहदाको प्रमाणपत्र पेश गरेपछि आफ्नो काम आरम्भ गरे । परराष्ट्र सेवामा २७ वर्षको अनुभवको आधारमा तथा शिष्टाचार महापालको रूपमा करिब दुई वर्षको कार्यकालमा प्राप्त गरेको कामको अनुभवको आधारमा राजदूत जस्तो गहन जिम्मेवारी सम्हाल्ने अवसर मिलेको थियो । साथै, मलेशिया ७ लाखसम्म नेपाली श्रमिकहरू कार्यरत रहेको मुलुक भएको हुँदा काम अत्यन्तै चुनौतीपूर्ण पनि थियो ।

विदेशमा कार्यरत नेपाली श्रमिकहरूले नेपालको कुल गार्हस्थ उत्पादनको ३० प्रतिशत योगदान गरेको विप्रेषण (Remittance) अर्थतन्त्रको एउटा महत्वपूर्ण हिस्सा भएको छ । प्राप्त तथ्याङ्कअनुसार कूल विप्रेषणको एक तिहाई अर्थात् कूल गार्हस्थ उत्पादनको १० प्रतिशत मलेशिया एक्लो मुलुकबाट मात्र प्राप्त हुन आउने हुँदा देशको अर्थतन्त्रमा श्रमिकहरूबाट महत्वपूर्ण योगदान रहेकोले त्यहाँ स्थित नेपाली राजदूतावासको अहम् भूमिका हुने कुरा मैले बुझेको थिएँ । त्यसै कारण मैले ९० प्रतिशत काम यसैमा केन्द्रित गरी नेपाली श्रमिकहरूलाई के कसरी सहज हुन्छ भनी होस्टेल सुविधाहरू, बीमाको दायरा बढाउने, न्यूनतम ज्याला बढाउने, स्वास्थ्य सेवा सहज उपलब्ध गराउने, नेपाली श्रमिकहरूप्रति गरिने शोषण र हत्या हिंसा आदि विषयमा मलेशियन पक्षसँग कुरा अगाडि बढाएँ । तर, यस विषयमा मलेशियन पक्षबाट ठोस सकारात्मक प्रयास गर्ने छाँटकाँट देखिएन । त्यसैले श्रमिकको कल्याणकारी पक्षपट्टि मैले ध्यान दिन थालें र निम्न लिखित कुराहरूमा विशेष ध्यान दिई कार्य अगाडि बढाएँ ।

१. नेपाल सरकारले सन् २००६ देखि नै द्विपक्षीय श्रम सम्झौता सकभर चाडो गर्न मलेशिया सरकारलाई अनुरोध गर्दै आएको थियो । हाम्रो धेरै दबाव र अनुरोध पछि मलेशियाको एउटा प्रतिनिधिमण्डल फेब्रुअरी २०१७ मा बार्ताको लागि नेपाल आउन तयार भयो । सम्झौताको एउटा मस्यौदामा दुवै पक्षबीच प्रारम्भिक छलफल तथा आदानप्रदान भइरहेको थियो । त्यसैलाई आधार मानी दुवै सरकारी पक्षबीच प्रथम चरणको वार्ता काठमाडौँमा २०-२१ फेब्रुअरी २०१७ मा सम्पन्न भयो ।

यसै समयमा सन् २०१८ को १० मे मा विपक्षी नेता तथा पूर्व प्रधानमन्त्री डा. महाथिर मोहमदले चुनाव जितेर पुनः प्रधानमन्त्री हुनुभयो । तत्कालीन प्रधानमन्त्री नजीव रजाक र उप-प्रधानमन्त्री डाक्टर अहमद जाहिद हमीदीले भ्रष्टाचार गरेकोबारे चुनाव अघिदेखि नै मलेशियामा व्यापक विरोध भई चुनावी मुद्दा बनेको थियो । यस्ता भ्रष्टाचारका आरोपहरूमा विदेशी श्रमिकहरू खासगरी नेपाली श्रमिकहरूलाई ठगेको भन्ने पनि थियो । त्यसैले पनि नयाँ मानव संसाधन मन्त्री कुलसेगरनले अक्टोबर २०१८ मा नेपाल भ्रमण गरी नेपाली समकक्षी श्रम मन्त्री गोकर्ण विष्टसँग दुइपक्षीय श्रम सम्झौता सम्पन्न भयो जसबाट नेपाली श्रमिकहरूलाई केही राहत पुर्याउने काम भयो । यो सम्झौता हुँदा म आफ्नो कार्यकाल पूरा गरी फेब्रुअरी २०१८ मा नेपाल फर्किसकेको भएतापनि मेरो कार्यकालमा थालिएको वार्ताको परिणाम सकारात्मक आएकोमा खुसी भएको छु, किनभने राजदूतावासले प्रस्ताव गरेका बुँदा पनि त्यस सम्झौतामा धेरै परेका छन् ।

२. मेरो पहलमा नेपाली श्रमिकहरूको मलेशियामा पर्ने गरेको कानुनी समस्या हल गर्न राजदूतावासले वार्षिक शुल्क तिर्ने गरी एउटा मलेशियाली कानून फर्मलाई सेवा प्रदान गर्ने समझदारीपत्रमा हस्ताक्षर गरी काममा लगाउने काम भयो । यो सेवा मार्च २०१६ देखि सुरु भएकोले धेरै नेपाली श्रमिकहरूको फौजदारी लगायत कम्पनीसँगको कानुनी झै झगडा सुल्झाउन ठूलो मद्दत पुग्न गई धेरै नेपाली श्रमिकहरूले कानुनी उपचार प्राप्त गरे । धेरैले शीघ्र नै जेलबाट छुटकारा तथा फौजदारी मुद्दामा सफाई पनि पाए । उदाहरणको लागि राजदूतावासको तर्फबाट सानातिना

धेरै कानुनी समस्या समाधान हुनुको अतिरिक्त १५ जना नेपालीलाई मृत्युदण्डको फैसला भएको केसमा समेत मुद्दा लडी नौ जनालाई छुटकारा दिलाउने काममा सफलता प्राप्त भयो । यो कानुनी फर्ममा हिन्दी भाषा पनि बोल्ने वकिलहरू भएकोले अदालतमा नेपालीहरूले आफ्नो कुरा राख्न पाउँदा अदालतले उनीहरूको पक्षमा निर्णय गर्न सजिलो हुन गयो । राजदूतवासले गरेको प्रमुख काम यो पनि थियो र अहिलेसम्म निरन्तर नै भई रहेको छ ।

३. मेरो पहलमा मलेसियाको सरकारी समाचार समिति बर्नामासँग एक सम्झौता गरी उक्त संस्थाको एफ एम रेडियो जुन मलेसिया भरी सुन्न सकिन्छ, त्यसमा हप्ताको हरेक आइतबार बेलुका एकघण्टाको श्रमिकहरूका समस्या समाधान गर्ने उद्देश्य राखी नेपाली भाषामा एउटा कार्यक्रम सञ्चालन सुरु भयो । त्यो कार्यक्रम अप्रिल २०१७ देखि शुरु भई करिब डेढ वर्ष चलेको थियो । त्यो कार्यक्रम खासगरी श्रमिकका समस्याहरू समाधान गर्नेतर्फ केन्द्रित रहेको थियो । त्यहाँको चाल चलन तथा रिती रिवाज आदि बारे पनि यथेष्ट जानकारी दिई त्यस विरुद्ध आचारण नगर्न समेत सचेत गराइने गरिन्थ्यो ।
४. राजदूतवासले अक्टोबर २०१६ देखि आफ्नो फेसबुक सुरु गर्‍यो जसबाट श्रमिकहरूले राजदूतावासलाई आफ्नो मोबाइलमार्फत सिधै सम्पर्क गर्न सक्ने भए । अब एफ.एम. रेडियोको सट्टा हरेक शुक्रवार फेसबुक लाइभ गरी श्रमिकका गुनासा तथा समस्याहरू समाधान गर्ने व्यवस्था सुरु गरिएको थियो र अहिले पनि निरन्तर छ ।
५. श्रमिकहरूको गुनासोलाई सम्बोधन गर्न एउटा २४ घण्टे हटलाइन टेलिफोनको व्यवस्था राजदूतावासले जनवरी २०१६ देखि सुरु गर्‍यो । त्यसबाट केही हदसम्म भएपनि राजदूतावासले श्रमिकहरूको सुरक्षालाई सुनिश्चित गर्न मद्दत पुग्न गयो । नेपालका राजदूतावासहरू मध्ये क्वालालम्पुरको दूतावास यस्तो २४ घण्टे सेवा दिने पहिलो नै बन्न पुग्यो । अहिले पनि यो सेवा कायम नै छ ।
६. मेरो पहलमा मलेशियामा ७० प्रतिशत नेपाली श्रमिकहरूले सिमकार्ड प्रयोग गर्ने DIGI कम्पनीसँग सम्झौता गरी राजदूतावासले एउटा सुचनात्मक पकेट बुकलेट नेपालीमा प्रकाशित गर्‍यो । त्यसमा राजदूतावासको २४ घण्टे टेलिफोन नम्बर तथा अन्य नम्बर, इमेलको अतिरिक्त श्रमिकलाई आवश्यक पर्ने सम्पूर्ण सूचनाहरू उल्लेख गरिएको थियो । उक्त सिमकार्ड सबै श्रमिकहरूलाई वितरण गरिएको थियो ।
७. मेरो कार्यकाल अवधिमा समस्या परेका र अबैध भई बसेका ४३०५ जनालाई उद्धार गरी केहीलाई उनीहरूकै खर्चमा, केहीलाई सामाजिक संस्थाहरूको सहयोगमा र केहीलाई परिवार तथा साथीभाइसँगको आर्थिक सहयोगमा नेपाल फिर्ता पठाउने काम भयो । त्यसै गरी डिटेन्सन क्याम्पमा सजाय भोगिरहेका अन्य १०२० जनालाई सजाय मिनाहा गरी राजदूतावासको पहलमा

नेपाल सरकारको खर्चमा एकतर्फी हवाई भाडा दिई उद्धार गरेर नेपाल पठाउने काम भयो । साथै उक्त अवधिमा श्रमिकहरूको १ लाख २० हजार हस्तलिखित राहदानीलाई एम. आर. पी. मा परिणत गरी वितरण गरियो ।

प्रशासनिक कार्यहरू:

१. राजदूतावासको पहलमा परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयको निर्णयबमोजिम चारजना कुटनैतिक कर्मचारी र तीन जना स्थानीय कर्मचारीको दरबन्दी थप हुनुका साथै राजदूतावासको वार्षिक बजेट पनि झण्डै दोब्बर बढाउने कार्य भयो ।
२. राजदूतावास ३०८० वर्ग फिट मात्र क्षेत्रफल भएको साँगुरो स्थानमा भाडा तिरी बसेकोमा ६८०० वर्गफिटको कार्यालयमा मे २०१५ देखि स्थानान्तर भयो । नेपाली श्रमिकहरूलाई यातायात वस तथा रेल स्टेशनबाट पायक र सजिलो पर्ने क्वालालम्पुरको केन्द्रमा नै अहिले राजदूतावास अवस्थित छ । यसले गर्दा क्वालालम्पुर बाहेक अन्य ठूला सहरहरूबाट राजदूतावास आउन सजिलो भएको र ४०० जनासम्म एकै पटक भेला हुन सक्ने एउटा हल पनि राजदूतावास भित्र भएकोले सुविधाहरू उपलब्ध गराउन सहज भएको छ ।
३. राजदूतावासमा श्रमिकको भिड कम गर्न तथा उनीहरूको समस्या स्थानीय रूपमै समाधान गर्न पिनाड तथा शाह आलम क्षेत्रमा अवैतनिक वाणिज्यदूतावासहरूको स्थापना भयो । साथै सह-प्रमाणीकरण भएको मुलुक इन्डोनेसियामा पनि वाणिज्य दूतावास स्थापना गरी सोको कार्यालय सेप्टेम्बर २०१७ मा जाकर्तामा उद्घाटन भयो । यसबाट मानव तस्करहरूले राम्रो जागिरको प्रलोभन दिई अलपत्र पारेका नेपालीलाई उद्धार गर्न सजिलो भयो ।
४. यसैगरी करिब सात लाख नेपालीहरूको गन्तव्य भएको मुलुक मलेशियामा राजदूतावास र राजदूतको निवासको लागि आफ्नै भवन खरिद गर्न सकेमा सबैको लागि सुविधाजनक हुन सक्छ भनी दुई भवनहरू खरिद गर्न एउटा उपयुक्त प्रस्ताव गरी विस्तृत प्रतिवेदन परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयमा पठाएकोमा त्यसको सकारात्मक जवाफ आएन । यस विषयमा परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालयका एक जना उपसचिवको नेतृत्वमा एउटा सरकारी प्रतिनिधिमण्डल पनि काठमाडौँबाट मलेशिया गई सबै कुरा बुझी आएकोमा कुनै निर्णय हुन नसकेकोले कुनै काम अघि बढेन ।

उपसंहार:

माथि उल्लेखित सबै कुराहरू श्रमिक गन्तव्य भएका मुलुकमा अवस्थित नेपालका राजदूतवासहरू कतार, साउदी अरेबिया, यू.ए.इ., कुवेत, बहराइन तथा ओमानमा पनि समान रूपमा विध्यमान समस्याहरू हुन् । तर, मलेशियालगायत यी राजदूतावासहरूमा आपसी समन्वयको पूर्ण अभाव छ । उनीहरूको बीचमा कुनै पनि बैठक हुँदैन र यस्तो बैठक बेला बेलामा गरी अनुभवहरू र राम्रा कामहरू एक अर्काबाट सिक्ने प्रणाली पनि छैन । आ-आफ्नै तरिकाबाट काम भैरहेको छ ।

नेपाल सरकारबाट श्रमिकहरूलाई सुविधाहरू बढाउन सक्ने अवस्था छ तर परराष्ट्र मन्त्रालय र श्रम तथा रोजगार मन्त्रालयका साथै गृह तथा अर्थमन्त्रालयबीच आवश्यक समन्वयको अभाव देखिन्छ । राजदुतावासहरूको लागि केन्द्र (काठमाडौं) बाट समयमै निर्णय हुन नसक्नु पनि एउटा प्रमुख बाधा र समस्या भएको पाइन्छ । कतिपय निर्णयहरू राजदुतावासको पक्षमा नभई रोजगार व्यवसायीको पक्षमा हुन जानुले पनि नेपालको राजनीतिक स्थितिको अन्योल तथा एउटा असहज परिस्थितिको सिर्जना भएको मैले महसुस गर्नुपर्छ । यो एउटा दुःखद् अवस्था हो । उदाहरणको लागि, संसदको अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय सम्बन्ध तथा श्रम समितिका सभापति लगायत संसद सदस्यहरूको भ्रमणका अवसरमा सांसदहरूले राजदुतावासको समस्या समाधान गर्नेतर्फ भन्दा पनि वैदेशिक रोजगार कम्पनीहरूको पक्ष लिई कुरा गरेको पाइन्थ्यो । त्यसबाट उहाँहरू कुनै न कुनै रूपमा वैदेशिक रोजगार कम्पनीहरूबाट प्रभावित भए जस्तो देखिन्थ्यो । तर, जे भए पनि समग्र नेपाली श्रमिकहरूको हितलाई ध्यानमा राखी गन्तव्य मुलुकका राजदुतावासमा सेवाहरूलाई क्रमशः सुदृढ बनाउदै लैजानु पर्ने आजको आवश्यकता हो । नेपाल जस्तो अल्पविकसित मुलुकको कुल गार्हस्थ उत्पादनको ३० प्रतिशत योगदान दिने विप्रेषण पठाउने श्रमिकहरूको समस्यालाई हेर्नु पनि राष्ट्रिय हित नै हो भन्ने कुरा सबै तहमा मननु हुनुपर्ने देखिन्छ । तर, आन्तरिक रोजगारीलाई नै प्रवर्द्धन गरी वैदेशिक रोजगारीलाई क्रमशः प्रतिस्थापन गर्ने उद्देश्य सरकारले राख्नु नै उत्तम हुन जाने देखिन्छ ।

वैदेशिक रोजगारीलाई संविधानमा लेखिए अनुसार "शोषण मुक्त, सुरक्षित र व्यवस्थित गर्न तथा श्रमिकको रोजगारी र अधिकार प्रत्याभूति गर्न" निम्न लिखित सुझावहरू प्रस्तुत गरेको छुः

१. वैदेशिक रोजगारीसँग सम्बन्धित नेपाल सरकारका मन्त्रालयहरू, वैदेशिक रोजगार विभाग तथा वैदेशिक रोजगार बोर्डले समन्वयत्मक ढङ्गले कार्य गर्न अत्यावश्यक छ । हाल यस विषयमा राम्रो समन्वय हुन सकेको देखिदैन ।
२. वैदेशिक रोजगार कम्पनीहरूको आवधिक र आवश्यक नियमन निरन्तर भइराख्नु पर्ने देखिन्छ । स्वास्थ्य जाँच गर्ने र संस्थाहरूले गर्ने गरेको ठगी नियन्त्रणमा तदारुकता साथ कडा कारवाही अगाडि बढाउनु पर्ने देखिन्छ ।
३. वैदेशिक रोजगार कम्पनीहरूलाई तोकिएको प्रत्येक कामदारबाट लिने शुल्क रु १० हजारलाई बढाई करिब १ महिनाको श्रमिकको तलव बराबर दिन सकिने प्रावधान ल्याई बर्षौं देखिको ठगीलाई नियन्त्रण गर्नु पर्ने देखिन्छ । त्यसपछि नियमन र नियन्त्रण कडा रूपमा हुनु पर्ने देखिन्छ ।
४. मुलुकको लागि विप्रेषण भित्र्याउने युवाहरूलाई भन्सार सुविधा तथा अन्य सुविधाहरू दिनु उपयुक्त हुने देखिन्छ ।

५. गन्तव्य स्थानमा रहेका राजदूतावासहरूले उक्त मुलुकसँग नेपाली श्रमिकहरूका हितका लागि द्विपक्षीय श्रम सम्झौता गर्ने र नेपाली श्रमिकहरूलाई बढीभन्दा बढी सुविधाहरू उपलब्ध गराउन सधैं प्रयत्नशील रहनु पर्ने देखिन्छ ।
६. कोभिड-१९ महामारीको कारणले वैदेशिक रोजगारी गुमाएका श्रमिकहरूलाई नेपाल सरकारले देशभित्रै अविलम्ब रोजगारीको व्यवस्था गर्नु अत्यावश्यक देखिन्छ ।
७. भ्रष्टाचारमा संलग्न भई वैदेशिक रोजगार कम्पनीहरूलाई अनुचित सहयोग गरी श्रमिकलाई शोषण गर्ने कर्मचारी लगायत सबैलाई कडा कारवाही गर्नु पर्ने देखिन्छ । अहिलेसम्म यसमा सरकारले कडा कदम चालेको आभास पाइँदैन ।

Nepal-Myanmar Relations in the 21st Century



Paras Ghimire

Historical Bond

Nepal-Myanmar relations date back to at least 150 years when Nepali soldiers were first brought to Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, by the British to fight for them. This was followed by the influx of a large number of Nepali immigrants to Burma, who migrated as labourers and infrastructure builders. They toiled hard, and significantly contributed to the Myanmar's economy, particularly in the fields of agriculture and road construction. In a span of 150 years, there had been steady increase of Nepali immigrants to Burma to reach about two hundred and fifty thousand people, who now constitute a part of Myanmar's nationals of Nepali origin. The strong community of the people of Nepali origin in Myanmar scattered across the country exhibit high degree of trust and solidarity among themselves. They are also emotionally and culturally attached to their ancestral home- Nepal, which is reflected from time to time, including in their solidarity and support to the earthquake victims in Nepal in 2015.

Political Relations

Nepal and Myanmar established diplomatic relations in March 1960 and bilateral co-operation has been increasing ever since. There have been high level visits- from top political level to government-bureaucratic level to business and people to people level between both countries. It may be recalled that General Ne Win, the then Chairman of the Union of Myanmar, visited Nepal twice, in 1966 and 1977. Likewise, late King Mahendra and late King Birendra paid visits to Myanmar in 1970 and 1980, respectively. In the same vein, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Chair of National League for Democracy (NLD) and State Counselor (Prime Minister) visited Nepal twice, once in June 2014 and again in December 2018.

Both the countries have been striving to forge and strengthen cordial and sustainable relationship at the government, private sector, and at the people's levels. The present-day Nepal-Myanmar relations are characterized by warmth of friendship, mutual trust, goodwill and understanding and appreciation of each other's hopes and aspirations. A common factor that unites both countries is their shared Buddhist heritage. Lord

Gautam Buddha- the universal light of Asia was born in Nepal, and Myanmar is a predominantly Buddhist country. Nepal is a peaceful country and its hospitable people have many striking resemblance with the people of Myanmar.

Economic Reform and Modernization

Nepal and Myanmar are both developing nations where agriculture is the key economic activity. In a rapidly changing world marked by knowledge society and sweeping information technology, economic liberalization and privatization have worked wonders and Myanmar can't be an exception. This nation was once the leading rice producer in the world and is now working to regain that position. Similarly, agro-products like timber, lentils, beans and fruits being major exportable items have very good prospects over the long haul. The people of both countries can benefit by sharing experiences on these fronts. It is an acknowledged fact that there is tremendous agriculture market potential in Myanmar, which can be given a sustained, even increased, momentum with the political, economic and all-encompassing reforms now underway in the country. Within a brief span of time, Myanmar is set for a turnaround with the goodwill of the international community, international investors, the United Nations and the like. Through the introduction of modern technology, Myanmar has, of late, been attracting in its much acclaimed reform drive as a result of which Myanmar is poised for a major leap and breakthrough in due course in all facets of development and modernization. We can learn lessons from Myanmar's recent drive for economic reform and modernization.

Bilateral and Sub-regional Cooperation

Nepal and Myanmar share common features as countries of rich natural resources truly presenting nature's panorama, which has attracted new kind of visitors. For our part, Nepal is in the Himalayas and we live in the lap of the Mount Everest, the highest peak in the world, which is endowed with its majestic beauty and the range is a repository of tremendous hydro-potential. Nepal and Myanmar can work together on such important areas as tourism development, establishment of industrial joint ventures, and multipurpose development of Nepal's hydro-potential for water navigation, drinking water, fisheries, together with power production- both bilaterally and through the BIMSTEC framework.

Nepal, which opened up for the tourist sector much earlier, has been able to attract only a million plus visitors in a year, whereas Myanmar, which opened its doors to foreign visitors more recently has been attracting 4.5 million visitors annually. We can learn from Myanmar's experience of preservation of religious and cultural heritage sites in the country and the promotion and marketing strategies to attract as many foreign visitors in the country. There has also been significant improvement in tourism

infrastructures across Myanmar in terms of good hotels, transport infrastructure, and tourism packages. In Nepal, while significant progress has been made in tourism sector, we have to go a long way to square with the burgeoning demand of the 21st century.

As tourism, and especially religious tourism, stands out among the potential areas Nepal and Myanmar could cooperate, a good number of Myanmar nationals visit Lumbini, the birth place of Lord Buddha each year, and with the Gautam Buddha International Airport at Bhairahawa, scheduled to open its services in the not too distant a future, direct air linkage between Nepal and Myanmar would go a long way in promoting religious tourism between both nations.

There also exist enormous prospects and potentials for trade and commercial relations between Nepal and Myanmar. The visit of FNCCI delegation to Myanmar in January 2013 and the delegation's talks with UMFCCI (Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry) have opened up vistas for further cooperation and collaboration on a range of business relations. While trade prospects between the two countries look good and promising, concerted efforts and collaboration on both sides are needed to give it a momentum.

Conclusion

It follows from the foregoing that as nations can be judged by strong and effective leadership, good management skills, integrity and well-coordinated across-the-board teamwork, upcoming, promising developing nations like Nepal and Myanmar should plan a long-term roadmap with specific objectives and work with vision and clarity of purpose directed towards the best national interests. Furthermore, looking ahead into the future, the challenging tasks of development are many and varied. It is now amply clear that no job at hand is independent and viewed in isolation of another. Nepal and Myanmar would do well to take each of its nation building task as both national challenge an international one, galvanizing the energetic human and national resources at its command for the common good of its people. The task ahead is not only enormous and acute, it also calls for creative and imaginative approach. It is not only knowledge and skills that we need to apply but sharing experiences and best practices coupled with the strength to act and act earnestly and without let-up; working together hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder will define the new 21st century robust Nepal-Myanmar relationship.

Belt and Road Initiative and Nepal



Dr. Rambhakta Thakur

Geo-economics of the world has been taking rapid turnings. As a result, all old economic growth equations have been failing one by one in attempt of addressing the destabilizing graphs of the global economy. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China is one of the economic waves that emerged at a time when the world economy, with trade war, protectionism, and syndrome of recession, was looking for a safe rescue. As the Chinese leaders claim, BRI has come to meet the challenges of time. Nevertheless, at this time it emerged as an opportunity and threat both to the dominating capitalist powers in the fields of trade, infrastructure and investment.

Inception and Aim

In fact, this concept was coined in 2013 by Chinese President Xi Jinping who drew inspiration from the concept of Silk Road established during the Han Dynasty 2000 years ago, an ancient network of the trade route that connected China to the Mediterranean via Eurasia for centuries. First time, the world came to know about it when President Xi originally announced the strategy during his official visit to Indonesia and Kazakhstan in 2013. Since then, it was known with various names as One Belt One Road Strategy, Silk Road etc. but finally, on 14 May 2013, the Beijing Conference on BRI officially announced its birth. There were 29 Heads of State and Government and representatives of over 129 countries and 70 international organizations.

As a matter of fact, BRI is a global development strategy adopted by the Chinese government involving infrastructure, development and investment. It is an ambitious program to connect Asia with Africa and Europe via land and maritime networks through six corridors with the aim of improving regional integration, increasing trade and stimulating economic growth. The Chinese claim it as more open and efficient international governance systems.

The most ambitious project of BRI has a target to be completed by 2049 which coincides with the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic. China wishes Nepal, as she was the ancient partner of the silk road, to continue in BRI for reaching out of vicious effects of landlockedness and heading towards international market by joining the roads in the North and South.

BRI 1 & 2 and Nepal

China has become the second largest trade partner of Nepal and has a 1414 kilometres of boundary with it. It sincerely wishes Nepal to be a partner of BRI. Similarly, the domestic pressure inside Nepal had also been built for signing BRI with an aim to economic growth and, further more important, to reduce the dependency with India. The Government could not resist these pressures, although India, USA and the EU intended to keep Nepal outside of BRI for the time being. But Nepal's then Finance Minister Dr. Ram Saran Mahat went to Beijing and signed the Understanding Paper of OBOR in December 2014.

The West and India both were suspicious about the interior intension of China as she has got the comparative advantages over the capitalist countries in the field of trade, infrastructure, pipelines, roads, highways, seaports and manufacturing goods. Many named the BRI as ' Chinese New Economic Order'. Some observers see it as a push for the Chinese dominance in the global affairs with a China-centered trading network. The West was looking at it as a more powerful plan than the Marshall Plan of 1948 for Europe. Amidst hope and fear, a majority of world traders and international organisations, including the UN, have been continuously watching and participating as well in the activities.

Nepal, with a character of small, poor, landlocked and very much depending on the southern neighbour, finds its vulnerability in playing an active role in almost unfavourable global and regional situation. Besides the outer reasons, its own production in agriculture, industries and other sectors are insignificant and the economy, much dependent on remittance, stands as bottleneck for realizing any giant project.

Big infrastructure projects- road, tunnels, railway or others- require huge investments, and if they are not sustainable, it would simply be an unbearable burden on the shoulders of Nepal which may fall into a debt trap in the future. In the meantime, the situation in Nepal, after great earthquake of 2015, had become so painful that it compelled the country to develop roads and other connectivities with China not only for survival in natural calamities, but also to develop its trade for development. The decision to accept BRI was further validated when there was economic blockade imposed in the southern border. These two strong reasons became determining points for Nepal to take part in BRI for rapid economic development and also to end up the monopoly of one country. Although opening to the north is very expensive, there was no option left out for Nepal for survival in the future than signing a protocol of transit with China along with construction of road in Rasuwagadhi to Kathmandu at the end of 2015.

The panic and the trouble for Nepal throughout the period of 2015-2017 is quite understandable as she was engaged in the protection of lives of the people and repairing and rebuilding roads and other infrastructures. Because of devastating effects of the earthquake, Nepal, during this period, could not take any decisive position towards BRI and that created irritation and misunderstanding with China as to the intention of participation, because by that time India had openly criticised and refused to join it. In countering BRI diplomacy, India's intention was to drag Nepal into its sphere of influence and delay the adherence of Nepal as much as possible. Under much pressure, finally, Nepal presented 36 projects to China to be considered under BRI. The then Deputy Prime Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara and a team hurriedly flew to Beijing to participate in the opening ceremony of BRI where he signed the MOU on May 12, 2017.

Partnership

After participating in the first BRI conference, Nepal became very much engaged in selecting few very important projects out of 36 proposed projects. India, on the other hand, tried to allure Nepal by giving many attractive projects offer: Raxaul-Kathmandu railways, Motihari-Amelekhgunj Petrol Pipeline, Arun 3rd hydro power project and others. As the 2nd BRI conference was near, a great pressure on Nepal was mounted to present only a few concrete projects in the BRI conference in 2019. For this reason, the government formed two committees to prepare a few selected projects out of a long list. This committee selected altogether 9 projects, i.e., 3 roads, 2 hydro electricity plants, 1 cross border railways, 1 cross border transmission line and 1 technical institution in the name of late Madan Bhandari. With this list, President Bidya Devi Bhandari led a high level delegation to Beijing to participate in the second BRI on February 24, 2019. This summit of BRI was a success. Participants from 100 countries, 90 international organisations, including United Nations, and Heads of the State and Government from 37 countries raised the hope of smooth developing of BRI in global economic network by signing the agreement to support BRI by 115 countries, including Italy and Greece from European Union. However, USA and India have not participated in the forum.

But, Chinese with a great satisfaction revealed that deals worth of \$64 billion had been signed. President Xi additionally announced in the inauguration function to provide \$125 billion for the project from China on special concessional easy term loan for investment. With promising 38 points communique, the Second BRI was closed on February 27, 2019.

Nepal's concerns of connectivity, as President Bidya Devi Bhandari had expressed in the summit, were incorporated in the communique. Trans-Himalayan multi-dimensional connectivity network and Nepal-China cross border railways are two projects taken care of under the BRI flagship. The MOU which was signed allows landlocked Nepal to

use seven sea and land ports in China for its international trade. Modalities have to be finalised. BRI could be very effective tool with the projects passed in the summit for the socio- economic transformation of Nepal.

Belt Road Initiative projects are sustainable and eco-friendly, and well received by the partners, despite USA, Japan, Australia, European Union and India's non-participation. The BRI covers 115 country members including, 65% of the world population and more than 40% of the global Gross Domestic Product as of 2017. China on its success says its trade with Belt and Road countries has exceeded \$5 trillion. One study on future BRI trade reveals 3.4% more trade within BRI countries, and 2.4 % trade growth in the world.

In view of the encouraging economic scenarios of BRI; USA, EU, India, Australia and Japan are worried about the possible further dominance of China in the world economy. India and USA are taking steps to speed up the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway as an option of BRI. Similarly, Japan and EU have signed a new agreement to link Asia and Europe for the uninterrupted speedy trade to countries like the 'New Silk Road' of China. America has introduced 'Indo-Pacific Strategy' to mitigate and neutralize the effects of Chinese entry into the Pacific region.

But BRI was designed to reshape the world economy and its global strategic balance. There are huge opportunities. Improved infrastructure means more trade, more investment, higher growth, developing land-locked countries to the status of land-linked, means in total a prosperous country. Higher number of countries with BRI indicates their faith and confidence in BRI future. Paradoxically, at the same time, few countries engaged with BRI are conspicuous and facing hard time in the domestic fronts about the risk of being trapped in debt.

Debt Traps

Let us take few cases how the Chinese debt, a tight-rope walk, has been gradually tightening around the neck of the borrowers because of its unsustainability. Sri Lanka is a burning example to be cited- she was forced to cede the deep water port harbor of Hambantota to the control of China for 99 years because the loan and the interest are so huge that they can't be paid by this non-profitable projects.

In the last five years, China's direct investment under BRI surpassed \$60 billion in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, and leaving several recipients vulnerable. The Centre for Global Development, a think tank says; BRI investments have significantly increased the risk of debt crisis in eight countries: Mongolia, Laos, Maldives, Montenegro, Pakistan, Djibouti, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. There is serious problem of balance of payment in Bali and looking for bailout by IMF. Few months ago, Malaysia, acted preemptively, shelving through China- booked projects including a \$20 billion railway line' that it said it could no longer afford'.

Pakistan relied heavily on BRI loan for a \$54 billion project linking its Gwadar port to China. It is said 91% of the revenue generated by Gwadar port project over the next 40 years will benefit China. Poor and weak small countries situated in the strategic places are likely to be victims of the projects where their economic performances would not be rewarding and sustainable. Many African, Latin American and Caribbean countries are excited, but, at the same time, afraid seeing the pitiable economic performances of some similar countries in their vicinity.

There have been serious concerns over the projects in the form of geo-colonialism. In BBC HardTalk, some western governments have accused the Belt and Road Initiative of being geo-colonial due to what they allege as China practice of debt trap diplomacy to fund the initiative's infrastructure projects. However, the Chinese government characterises claims of geo-colonialism or debt trap diplomacy as manipulations to sow mistrust about China's intensions. The Chinese further argue that such western perceptions of the Belt and Road Initiative are misconstrued due to western conceptions of development as seen through their own lens of exploitation of others for resources— as exemplified by European colonisation— instead of through Chinese conceptions of development.

Besides the fear of comparative advantage of China over India, seen and unseen threat, the government officials in India have repeatedly objected to China's Belt and Road Initiative, specially because they believe the 'China–Pakistan Economic Corridor' (CPEC) project ignores New Delhi's essential concerns on sovereignty and territorial integrity.

But, whatever doubts casted over the ambition of China, it seems BRI amidst love and suspicion atmosphere is taking its courses in a planned way with a calculated returns. Secondly, BRI conclusion also noticed in enlargement of Maritime Silk Road cooperation by thirteen with the special entry of Singapore. On the road rail chapter, freight train services between China and Europe were initiated in March 2011. The service's first freight route linked China to Tehran. The China-Britain route was launched in January 2017. As of 2018 the network had expanded to cover 48 Chinese cities and 42 European destinations delivering goods between China and Europe.

BRI and Nepal's Projects

Going through in very brief, the inception, aim and activities of BRI now come about Nepal. Financing of the project has become a riddle to be solved. How to manage funds for the construction of huge infrastructures, roads, tunnels, and train from Kerung (China) to Kathmandu (Nepal) via Rasuwagadhi, the Nepal-China border? Should it be built on loans or grant or interest-free loan/concessional loan? That has to be decided at the outset keeping in view the bilateral, regional and international geo-economic situation. To understand the challenging concerns and cost precisely, construction done in Chengdu-Lhasa sector costed over 20 billion per km. and Kerung-Kathmandu

is 175 km. but the terrains and topography are more difficult than Chengdu. Naturally, that increases an additional cost by 54% of the budget. That means, the cost would be enormous for the weak economy of Nepal.

Nepal does not like to take any loan for this giant project; it rather wants that China should build it under the framework of foreign aid. The reason is clear because of massive loan involved in materializing the project would be out of capacity to payback in the present poor economic scenario for Nepal. Therefore, under these circumstances, the first stretch of Kerung-Kathmandu road project would be advisable. No further expansion to Pokhara and Lumbini projects initiative at the present stage. The best solution would be to take interest-free loan and develop the economic capacities of the northern mountain regions with fruits, animal husbandry, cottage industry, tourism, medicinal herbs, mines and hydro powers so that the import and loans could be paid by our own newly generated incomes. The estimated time of railway to come to Kathmandu would take no less than 15 years. During this time, we can develop our paying capacity by developing economic activities as mentioned above. Our deficit of trade with China, at present, is very alarming: over NRs 200 billion a year.

The loan and investment policies of China have already manifested in its infrastructure development activities that not allowing such grants projects under BRI flagship projects. In these circumstances, Nepal should be cautious and calculative in taking loans and its rate of returns. Nepal should not fall in debt trap like many other countries. To make it sustainable, it is imperative to prepare Nepal in the term of export and income generating economic activities to be able to cope with the growing needs of strategic development.

Conclusion:

All economic engagements and activities taken under BRI, and its enthusiastic responses, suggest that China has stood against the conventional theories and models of economic growth. The dream of Deng Xiaoping in 70s to make China more open and strong country by achieving four modernisations by the end of the 20th century has become the foundation stone for President Xi Jinping to march ahead with a new and highest ambition like the BRI for entering into a new era of globalisation. China is also using the BRI to address access capacity in its industrial sectors, in the hope that whole production facilities may eventually be migrated out of China into BRI countries.

A report from Fitch Ratings suggest that China's plan to build ports, roads, railways and other forms of infrastructures in under-developed Eurasia and Africa is out of political motivation rather than the real demand for infrastructure.

The BRI is believed by some analysts to be a way to extend Chinese influence at the cost of the US, in order to fight for regional leadership in Asia. Some geopolitical analysts have couched the BRI in the context of Halford Mackinders Heartland Theory. Many find John Adam's saying correct that the world can be controlled either by weapons

or by the debt. China is perhaps doing the same. At present time, in the past few years only, China has already invested billions of dollars in several South Asian countries like Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan to improve basic infrastructure. The results are yet to be seen to judge the suspicious remarks.

In a free and open world economy, the rules of the game and free market forces are the determining factors of most of the things. The USA, EU, Japan, Australia and India must understand that nothing can be applied forcefully in the world economy. This theory is equally valid for China too, despite its lucrative ambition of BRI. A compromising point has to be found where the contradictory economic interest intersects each other. Solely BRI may not be capable to run with its name unless western forces support it, nor would newly developed linking points of roads in Asia and Europe emerge as alternative solutions without Chinese participation. It may be; a concept of 'Global Road', 'New Economic Order Road', or similar ideas may take place to be functional with two giant economic powers. It is an open secret that the USA wants to stop its rival China by all means from becoming the first economic power; otherwise, it would be a great defeat for USA and capitalist economic models on which they were proud of leading the world for the last two centuries. In this light, Chinese model of development has bluntly challenged all existing theories, models and principles by becoming the second world economic power doing economic miracles in a very limited time.

Discussing the bright sides of the newly emerged economic order initiated by China does not mean that all are not fine with its propounder. There are some seen and unseen strings attached in the smooth functioning of BRI which may cause hurdles for China that dissuades the full-fledged manoeuvring of the goal to be achieved by 2049. In short, they may be outlined as below:

- a. First, in BRI sprawling economic activities, not only China would expand its trade, technology and investment in those countries, but rest of the world also like to receive the same benefits for entering in the vast market of China by demanding more relax on duty, non-tariff barrier, and minimising negative list and protectionism.
- b. Chinese labours used in the BRI projects in foreign countries may not be appreciated
- c. Terrorists may get loopholes to enter into China
- d. Arms and ammunitions may be explicitly transferred to China
- e. Tibet and Xinjiang could be more destabilized
- f. Taiwan and Honk Kong may be targeted by so-called liberal groups with a support of the Western world
- g. Italy and Greece may not be reliable partners as they have signed a non- binding agreement with BRI

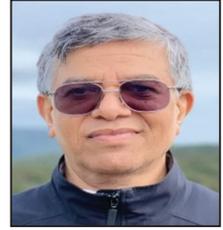
These are some vital issues which China may not like to overlook at the cost of territorial integrity and unity of China. If these scenarios are provoked and create difficult situation, in that case there is a greater possibility for China to curb the anti-elements which are threatening and hampering the sprawling economic diplomacy of BRI. It means, China may be forced to slowdown its own race.

Similarly, Nepal should also be very cautious while taking loans from China under the BRI flagship. Unless it is rentable and sustainable there should not be a hurry to start any project under Trans-Himalayan Multidimensional Network Project,

Other projects, Kerung–Rasuwagadhi tunnel needs a careful study about the viability. Preparation to meet the cost and the interest is most important factor to judge the payback capacity of the project. In no case, the loans covering the project should become a burden of debt turning its vulnerability into debt trap. But, in case for the good reason, if it is materialized, managing all liabilities and gains, no doubt, it would be a game-changer for the economic development of Nepal.

The closing words are–BRI, in principle, is a very ambitious and powerful economic initiative launched by China which has a capacity to reshape the world economy by creating a new global economic order, but at the same time, it needs very careful and serious applications of all provisions to become sure of its sustainability.

Diplomatic Gifts: Objects, Intentions and Occasions



Rudra Kumar Nepal

“An ambassador should refuse to accept any gifts or presents, either from the prince to whom he is sent or from any of his people for any cause whatsoever, unless, having already taken leave, he is about to mount his horse.” — Hotman de Villiers, 1603, cited by J.J. Jusserand

“If an envoy seeks by means of presents to secure the goodwill or friendship of those who can assist him in attaining his objects, but without either expressly or tacitly asking from them anything wrong, this is not to be regarded as bribery.” — G. F. de Martens

(Source: The Diplomat’s Dictionary, 2010 by Chas. W. Freeman, Jr.)

I. Introduction:

Human society is built on interpersonal relationships based on mutual respect, friendship and cooperation. A conscious and continuous nurturing of these values is an essential prerequisite for its healthy growth and development. When this is transposed to inter-state relations we get to diplomacy as one of its essential tools. And it is at this point that diplomatic gifts appear as one of the time-honored practices adopted to provide vigour and vitality to diplomacy in the wider international context.

In this essay, I propose to present a glimpse of the long-standing diplomatic practice of gift-giving in different socio-political contexts across the world. In course of doing this I will refer to some of the visual and material objects exchanged as diplomatic gifts at different times and occasions in history and try also to indicate the intents behind some of such exchanges that have left their indelible marks in the history of diplomatic relations and global politics. Gifts exchanged during the Macartney mission of 1793 to China and the Perry expedition of 1853-54 to Japan will be briefly discussed in this context. I will also touch upon Nepal’s own practice of diplomatic gift-giving with special references to gifts exchanged during Jang Bahadur Rana’s historic visit to Britain in 1850 as well as in course of the more institutionalized system of sending Nepali quinquennial missions with diplomatic gifts to China for over a century between 1792 and 1906.

In common parlance, a gift is something given for free, and most of the time without expecting any reciprocal returns from the recipient. It is for this reason that the age-old English saying 'don't look a gift horse in the mouth' still stands as a norm of standard social conduct in some western societies. However, in a pioneering work entitled 'The Gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies' on the gift culture of some of the 'archaic' societies of Polynesia, Melanesia and the Pacific Northwest, French sociologist Marcel Mauss theorized almost a century ago that gift exchange in these societies was a 'system of total benefits' (*systeme des prestations totales*) and that the act, although seeming to be voluntary in theory, was in reality executed with a sense of obligation to reciprocate. Mauss derived three broadly common themes underlying the custom of gift exchange practiced by them: the obligations to give, to receive and to reciprocate. In other words, gifts do activate a cycle of reciprocal obligation in the minds of the recipients. Mauss believed that the conclusion he derived from the study of the 'archaic' societies could 'explain historically our own societies'. And this sociological logic of his is almost exactly applicable in the field of diplomacy and diplomatic gift-giving. It was indeed one of the prominent features of the Amarna diplomacy more than three thousand years ago, and it continues to characterize almost all latter-day diplomatic undertakings around the globe. It is indeed a truism that diplomacy believes in reciprocity as one of its defining features.

Diplomacy is an ancient business. And, as mentioned earlier, gift-giving happens to be one of the long-standing and widely popular instruments in the toolkit of a diplomat. Diplomatic gifts are therefore nothing new in the realm of statecraft and diplomacy. In fact these were found to have been in practice in the Near East ever since the Amarna period when 'the exchange of royal gifts was a diplomatic gesture of friendship, and the lack of it was a sign of hostility.' (Hamilton and Langhorne: 8). Exchange is the key word here which presupposes reciprocity as a social norm. '[E]xchanges ranging from brides, gifts and wealth to military assistances, were governed by strong norms of reciprocity' under the Amarna diplomacy. (Jonsson and Hall: 51). 'Specific reciprocity' rather than 'diffuse reciprocity' was the prevailing norm then. Whenever either side felt that gifts were not duly reciprocated, complaints were lodged in strong terms, as was done by the Babylonian king to the Egyptian Pharaoh in these words: 'My gift does not amount to what I have given you every year'. The Mittanian king Tushratta is also recorded to have voiced similar grievances about his gifts saying 'in comparison with mine they are not equivalent'. (Jonsson and Hall: 51)

Being an ancient business, diplomacy has evolved its own sets of norms and practices over the centuries which are commonly, and almost invariably, followed within the profession. A number of such diplomatic norms and practices are sustained only by custom, not by the diplomatic law. Diplomatic gift-giving is one such practice.

What makes something a 'diplomatic gift'? Wikipedia says diplomatic gift is 'a gift given by a diplomat, politician or leader when visiting a foreign country.' This definition is crisp but the elements of state representation and reciprocation need to be considered as well.

The Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Diplomacy (2012) equates a diplomatic gift with a 'present' which it defines as 'a gift from one head of state to another, or by a receiving state to an accredited representative'. This definition is a bit restrictive as it limits the act of gift-giving to the level of the heads of state, and by a host country to an accredited representative only. In common usage, however, it would be more appropriate to define a diplomatic gift as something officially given on behalf of one state to another at the level of the head of state or government, or exchanged between duly authorized officials and accredited state representatives.

II. Diplomatic Gift-giving: a Brief Historical Survey

The numerous royal exchanges that had taken place among the rulers of the Near Eastern polities in the 14th century BC have been collectively given the name of Amarna Letters by scholars who first came across them more than a century ago, in 1887. These are in the form of clay tablets in cuneiform and were found near a village called Tell-el-Amarna in Egypt. That is why they are known as Amarna Letters. They are written in 'Akkadian' which used to be the lingua franca of diplomatic communication in the region. They 'represent a considerable and notable source of information on diplomatic procedures and practices between two socially equal partners. In addition, they provide us with information on the relationship between a superior power and its subjects' (Mynarova: 180). Scholars studying these letters suggest that three important items of exchange in human relationships viz., messages, gifts, and women happen to be the major subjects of diplomatic communication in the Amarna Letters. Precious metals such as gold and silver, gem stones such as lapis lazuli, and ivories used to be the prized gift items in those days. Gifts were carefully scrutinized both by the giver and the receiver to check the quality and evaluate them in order to prepare for due reciprocation. In the words of one scholar, 'The exchange of gifts appears to have been the Amarna counterpart of today's handshake as a symbol of good relations' (Jonsson: 194). He further adds, '... in the same way as a refusal to shake hands is today taken as an indication of hostility, the absence of gifts or the delivery of inferior gifts were seen as deteriorating relations in the ancient Near East' (Jonsson: 194)

Classical Greece appears to be generally antagonistic to the idea of gift exchange, as they perceived in such gifts the veiled presence of the corrupting influence of bribery.

The Romans considered gifts as a gesture of goodwill, and also a mark of diplomatic overture. It could also indicate the successful conclusion of a diplomatic deal. Accepting a gift meant willingness to cooperate and work together while refusal to accept could be interpreted as a signal of disapproval and troubles in the making.

In 647, Chinese records indicate, a Nepali envoy visited Changan with presents for the T'ang emperor. (Rose: 11). In 651, King Narendra Dev sent another mission to China. During the rule of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), which succeeded the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), five Chinese missions and seven Nepali missions were exchanged between 1384 and 1427 (Rose: 12). Gifts must have been exchanged during these missions although details remain unexplored.

The Byzantium used 'befitting and suitable' presents to rulers beyond its borders in the interest of maintaining good relations with outside powers and polities. The Byzantines and their Muslim neighbours engaged with each other's cultures of gift-giving. (Talbot: 112) Turk or Uighur nomads and their Han neighbours are known to have exchanged diplomatic gifts on the occasion of marriages between them as a mark of respect. An eighth-century T'ang envoy who came empty-handed to a Turkic tribe had to hurriedly arrange for gifts of textiles and wine to avoid a likely hostile treatment.

The Chinese emperors and the Ottomans were known for giving rich gifts in return for the 'tributes' they received from other rulers and thus liked to be seen as more prosperous, generous and respectable overlords. Their world views were shaped and sustained by their perceptions of lord and vassal relationships with the tributary states. According to one author, gift in the Ottoman view, 'consolidated the initial foundation upon which relations were built, and the maintenance of friendship required further gifts.' (Talbot: 108). Without gifts no commercial or political business could progress with the Ottomans. The same was true with the Mughals in India.

Coming to the age of modern diplomacy, beginning with the emergence of the institution of resident embassies in the fifteenth century Italy, which then started to gradually spread across Europe, gift exchanges began to assume a new significance as an embedded feature of European diplomacy. Monarchy was still the order of the day. And the close familial ties built amongst the European royal households through intermarriages and dynastic network of interconnections were the main contributory factors in the growing use and magnificence of the gift culture. This act of gift-giving was marked by a distinct aura of munificence coupled with a symbolic air of greatness, abundance and honour on the part of the giver.

Ambassadors in early European diplomacy used to be considered the personal representatives of their monarchs. They were supposed to embody and reflect the persona, power, esteem and glory of their respective sovereigns. This was indeed the reason for the emergence of the so-called representative character theory of diplomatic immunity, one of the oldest concepts in the realm of diplomatic practice until it was found to be of little practical value and, therefore, untenable by the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961. One way of conveying a monarch's exaggerated sense of self-esteem and superiority was by lavishing gifts and honours on other monarchs and visiting ambassadors so as to win their loyalty, favour and goodwill. In fact, in the early modern period such was the prevailing mood at the Ottoman, Mughal and

several other European and Asian courts that the arrival of ambassadors tended to inflame material expectations. Venetian missions to the Ottoman court, for example, used to be sent with specially produced exquisite quality Venetian products including the highly prized regal cloth of gold and other luxury articles as presents for the Sultan in the sixteenth century. Between 1500 and 1600, Venice is said to have sent 70 ambassadors or Baili to Constantinople with huge amounts of gifts whose list on one particular year of 1599 covers over fifteen densely written pages which included some consumable items as well. (Mola: 59, 60)

And, ambassadors without appropriate gifts were destined to fail in their mission. This was the fate of the Swedish ambassador Claes Brorson Ralamb to Constantinople who had reached there without any suitable gift either for the sultan or the grand vizier in 1657. The fate of Vasco da Gama was no different either when he arrived Calicut, India, in the late fifteenth century without valuable gifts for the local king. Sir Thomas Roe, the first Ambassador of James I to the Mughal court of Jahangir in India in the early seventeenth century, had brought with him 'a scarf, swords, and some leather goods' as diplomatic gifts which is said to have prompted the Mughal emperor to suspect the greatness of his monarch. Sir Thomas Roe's embarrassment was further aggravated when the Persian ambassador who came soon after to the same court, brought a huge amount of diplomatic gifts, such as '27 Arabian horses, 9 mules, and 2 chests of Persian hangings' and over and above this, 'forty muskets, five clocks, one camel laden with Persian cloth of gold, ... twenty-one camels of wine of the grape, fourteen camels of distilled sweet water, seven of rose water, seven daggers set in stones ... [and] seven Venetian looking glasses' (Wright: 65). His predecessor had also been equally lavish in his gifts to the Mughal emperor. It is said that lack of suitable gifts adversely affected the performance of the European missions to the Mughal court until the later part of the seventeenth century.

Having found the custom of gift-giving as a ubiquitous global practice, and diplomatic gifts as a currency of no less significance in inter-state relations at least since the Amarna period itself, it would be of interest to see what kind of objects were chosen as diplomatic gifts and on what occasions they were usually exchanged.

III. Gift Objects:

The previous section cited some of the early forms of diplomatic gifts exchanged during the Amarna period and by the Byzantines and some others also. In the 11th century BC an Egyptian envoy sent to the Prince of Byblos in Lebanon to buy timber had to first offer a gift of 'four jars of gold, five jars of silver, five hundred ox hides, twenty sacks of lentils, and thirty baskets of fish' to the Prince before he could purchase timber, which in those days was a precious commodity (Wright: 4). Without adequate gifts, no business could proceed.

In AD 693, Arab rulers wishing to present a lion to the Chinese empress as gift had been politely dissuaded because it was not prudent to receive an animal whose upkeep would be a heavy burden on China when it was facing severe famine and scarcity.

In the tenth century, the Hungarian king sent dogs as present to the Byzantine emperor.

Giraffes were considered extravagant gifts. In 1414, the Chinese emperor was sent from East Africa a giraffe as tribute. Giraffes were considered an auspicious beast in China and therefore highly valued. Centuries later, in 1827, the pasha of Egypt sent giraffes as gift to the rulers of England, France and Austria.

Records of tribute missions sent from Japan to China and gifts from China to Empress Himiko of Japan through the representatives of the Wei dynasty in the third century are known to exist. (Vogel: 5). Japan used to send tribute missions with gifts to the Chinese emperor and additional goods for commercial purpose until 1549. Between 1403 and 1549, eleven such missions were sent to China (Vogel: 44). Tribute missions from Sri Lanka to Ming China were common in the fifteenth century. The Austrian Habsburgs were also required to send annual 'honorific gifts/tribute' to the Ottoman court following a peace treaty of 1547/48 until 1606.

In early fifteenth century, Tamerlane sent a Tartarian envoy to the King of Castile and presented him with two Hungarian slave girls, a gift the king did not appreciate much. (Roosen: 127)

In 1515, King Manuel I of Portugal received a rhinoceros as gift from Sultan Muzaffar II of Cambay (r. 1511-26) which the Portuguese King later presented to Pope Leo X. But the poor creature couldn't reach Rome; it got drowned on the way (Biedermann, Gerritsen and Rello: 18).

An exquisitely designed and carved ivory casket sent by a self-styled 'cakravarti' king of Sri Lanka to King John III (1521-57) of Portugal in 1541 was of such an exceptional quality that it got the admiring title of 'coronation casket'. This was not just an object of art, but more important it symbolized the giver's political and dynastic interests in cementing the 'Luso-Lankan alliance (Biedermann: 90-93). Scholars say a number of Sri Lankan ivory caskets bearing different motifs made their way to Europe during the sixteenth century.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when exploratory missions and missionaries had combed and mapped almost every corner of the globe, atlases were the most common diplomatic gifts. The Venetians, the Dutch and the French used to take special pride in their cartographic superiority and offered their atlases as presents with special pride. The British were proud of their quality textiles and these were the diplomatically and commercially most significant British gifts.

In the late sixteenth century, the Jesuit mission of Matteo Ricci, an Italian Catholic priest, to the Emperor of China, presented polyglot bibles, astrolabes, maps and clocks to establish social relationships.

To promote their commercial interests and secure trading privileges, the English East India Company (EIC) had no qualms about conforming to the Mughal practice of gift exchange, receiving khil'at and giving nazr (tribute). Gifts of cash, firearms, clocks, telescopes, and other luxury products were considered essential to maintain alliances in Bengal, the EIC's heartland. In Istanbul, around 10% of the Levant Company's expenditure is said to have been consumed by British gifts. The representatives of the Dutch East India Company had adopted a practical solution for gift presentation to the Japanese shogun by opting 'to be like vassals of the shogun' rather than claiming a diplomatic status since the 1630s.

In 1625, two lions were gifted by Algeria to London. In the early 1660s, a newly restored Charles II, King of England, was given clothing lined with sable, black fox, ermine furs, Persian carpets, hawks, horses, and bows and arrows by a Russian ambassador. Two lions and thirty ostriches were given by a Moroccan. The Russians gave Pelican to Charles II in 1664.

In 1717, Frederick William I of Prussia gifted an entire room, 'a candlelit Baroque confection of amber panels, mirrors, and mosaics,' as present to Peter the Great of Russia which earned the name 'Amber Room'.

Between 1728 and 1802, according to the British Civil List accounts, a total of 2.8% of British diplomatic expenditure had been spent on gifts to ambassadors resident in London, on the conclusion of treaties, or on embassies to and from the North African regencies and Morocco. Had the expenses on gifts to non-European polities been included, this amount would have become much bigger. This shows that gift giving was an established feature of British diplomacy in the eighteenth century (Talbot: 115). And it was with the decline in the fortunes of the East India Company in the nineteenth century that the British ceased to give nazr and receive khil'ats, a practice they had adopted from the Mughals.

In 1785, General George Washington was given two 'handsome donkeys' by the king of Spain 'in recognition of his military exploits' and they were graciously received by him as the U.S. constitution was still in the making and no legal prohibition existed until then to receive foreign gifts. Donkey had not yet become the democratic party mascot either !

'In 1823 the Sultan of Morocco, apparently feeling sorry for the poor Americans, gave them an embassy in Tangier', wrote an American diplomat in 1959, adding 'It is still in use but is somewhat dilapidated; the government would like to sell it but finds it awkward to sell a gift from the deceased Sultan' (Thayer: 115). By a treaty of 1795, the United States was under an obligation to pay annual tribute to Mustafa, the Dey of

Algiers, to protect the safety of its Mediterranean trade (Yilmaz: 11). And the Ottomans until that time seemed not even aware of the existence of the United States as an independent country.

In 1833 when the emperor of Morocco decided to present a lion and two horses to the United States, the constitutional prohibition on accepting foreign gifts was already in place. But the insistence of the emperor to accept the gift led the American consul in Morocco to receive the animals with great consternation and, after consultations with the home government, he shipped them to Philadelphia where they were quietly sold in auction.

These are just a few examples of the type of objects and personalities involved in diplomatic gift-giving in the past. A more detailed study shows that animals and birds of almost every kind- giraffes, elephants, lions, rhinos, camels, horses, donkeys, dogs, Pandas, boars, steers, oxen and even dragon and alligator as well as birds like falcons, hawks, ostriches, cassowaries, pelicans, pheasants, parrots etc.- have been used as diplomatic gifts at various times in the past. And the practice of gifting exotic animals continues even to this day, although in a much more attenuated form. Additionally, various other exquisite one-of-a-kind artistic products, precious jewels, stones, jewel-encrusted swords and knives, brocades, textiles, saddlery, porcelains, samples of path breaking technological and industrial products, highly prized consumable items etc. were also exchanged as diplomatic gifts. A continuous cycle of exchanging rare and valuable objects of competitive magnificence could be discerned in the selection of diplomatic gifts between the rulers of the early modern period of diplomacy. And a number of such gift items would ultimately land permanently at some European museums as an exquisite and exclusive piece of creative art on display.

Before dwelling on the contemporary trends and practices in diplomatic gift giving, it would be interesting to briefly discuss two missions of lasting global significance, unique in their own ways in respect of lavishing gifts on the two different and rather reluctant recipients in order to secure a privileged access to their markets: the Macartney mission to China and the Perry expedition to Japan.

IV. The Macartney Mission (1793) and Gift Diplomacy:

One such mission was that of Lord George Macartney who was sent to China as envoy of George III in 1793. Persuading China to allow Britain to open its permanent diplomatic mission in China, seeking additional ports for trade expansion, and ensuring more trade privileges and tariff concessions for the British merchants were his mission's main objectives. He had brought an impressive array of valuable presents to the Chinese emperor, and except for an often exaggerated initial hitch over the kowtow issue, he got lavish gifts in return and a very warm and generous hospitality throughout his time in China. The emperor met him on several occasions, even served wine by his own hands at a banquet, and left an impression of his infinite generosity and large

heartedness expressed through the scale of the presents given in return. However, in the event, Macartney's embassy was denied everything that it had expected to get from the Chinese emperor- no permission to the British to have a permanent diplomatic presence, no additional ports, and no extra trade privileges and tariff concessions. In that sense, except for being able to gauge the worldview of the Chinese Emperor and to read the Chinese mind much more closely, the Macartney mission happened to be a failed mission.

Published sources reveal that British gifts included: textiles (mainly high-quality woolen broadcloths), a pair of summer and winter carriages for the emperor, the planetarium (the most valuable scientific item, which was a combined clock, globe and orrery), Herschel reflector telescope, a Parker burning reflector, a scale model of HMS Royal Sovereign (one of the largest and best armed ships in the British navy), six brass cannon and two mortars, a pair of globes, a pair of chandeliers, various guns and pistols, fashionably decorated clocks and watches, saddlery, prints, fine porcelain, paper, and painted wall hangings. Additionally, the gifts which Macartney's predecessor's aborted mission of 1788 had prepared for taking to China were also brought with him and these included some traditional items such as silver mounted guns, spectacles, opera glasses, microscopes, watches, and a gold box mounted with large diamonds and decorated with enamel.

Likewise, the Chinese return gifts included: fine textiles in huge quantities, silk brocade woven to make a magnificent dragon robe, valuable satins, silk and gauzes, Korean cotton cloth for the six hundred British sailors waiting for the embassy aboard the English ships off the coast, items of sandalwood and cloisonné, jade, porcelain, vases, fans, incense, lacquerware in large quantities, a set of pictures of Qing battles, furniture, lanterns and sword blades, and a pair of boxes of Tibetan sugar.

Lucrative trade was undoubtedly the prime interest of the British in China. But the normative concern for sovereign equality between the two countries found a symbolic expression in Macartney's reason for refusing to kowtow before the Chinese emperor. In an imperial Chinese culture of nixing all competitive claims to equality, Macartney's arguments got lost into thin air.

British gifts were chosen clearly on the basis of what were most in demand in China and what brought the most profits. The selection of special gifts so purposefully made for the success of the Macartney mission did not succeed in deriving any substantive concessions from the Chinese side. What was more embarrassing for Macartney was that the Chinese outdid the British both in the quantity and value of the gifts, and that having seen the emperor's own impressive collection of gift items on display in the palace, the British had to decide not to present some of their less valuable gift objects to the emperor.

In a recent article in the *English Historical Review*, one British historian writes: 'British negotiating demands were backed up by five armed ships waiting off Ningbo, where the British hoped to obtain an island as a commercial base' (Harrison: 87). Even so well calculated and subtle diplomatic move of the British, with persuasion and coercion combined in good proportions, was ultimately foiled by the Chinese emperor who considered himself 'the Son of the Heaven' and the overlord of vassals, tributaries and barbarians all around.

V. The Perry Expedition (1853-54) and Gift Diplomacy:

Almost sixty years after Macartney's failed embassy to Qing China, an American mission led by Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Japan in July 1853 with a letter from the U.S. President Millard Fillmore, addressed to the Japanese emperor urging him to accept 'a few presents' which 'were of no great value in themselves' but could serve 'as specimens of the articles manufactured in the United States ... intended as tokens of ... sincere and respectful friendship'. Such a courteous and friendly Presidential letter was carried by a tough-minded U.S. Navy officer, Commodore Matthew Perry, whose arrogant and domineering manners made him known as a classic practitioner of 'gunboat diplomacy' in Japan.

Opening up Japan for trade was the main goal of the Perry mission. The President's 'few presents', which were so purposefully chosen, included: 'a one-quarter scale, fully operational steam-powered railroad (with track, tender, and car); two telegraph sets to span three miles (with batteries, gutta percha encased wire, and insulators); a copper lifeboat and surfboard; numerous examples of manufactures and agricultural implements; seeds and plants; a series of United States standard yard, gallon, bushel, balances and weights; Army pistols, Hall rifles, Maynard muskets, and swords; and one series of United States coastal survey charts. Numerous additional books and reports showcased American government, technology, and natural history, perhaps the loveliest and most costly being a double elephant folio of Audubon's *Birds of America*'. Besides these, there were many other gifts which were taken by the Perry mission. In a recent article in *Diplomatic History*, an American historian writes, 'six boats were required to transport the American gift to shore, carrying crates of arms, potatoes, lifeboats, books, whiskey, seeds, as well as all the pieces to assemble the railroad, telegraph, and agricultural machinery.' (Fullilove: 102)

The apparent generosity implicit in the gifts selected was dwarfed by the far from diplomatic manner in which Perry started conducting the mission once he was in Tokyo. Coercion rather than persuasion was his diplomatic style. He often ignored and undermined the Japanese modesty and deliberately defied the local customs and practices to exhibit his own power and supremacy in an effort to send signals to the Japanese that he was there to secure trade, if necessary by force. Perry deliberately undermined the gifts given by the Japanese on different occasions and always made sure to surpass them in giving return gifts so as to flaunt his superior status and power.

Perry's team also included an agriculturist who exercised a different kind of diplomatic gift giving — the seed and plant diplomacy. He distributed them to the common people wherever he went in Japan. Seeds in those days had a different value in the Japanese society because they were not sold but only exchanged between neighbours. In return, he collected many indigenous seeds and plants from the Japanese farmers and, after the treaty, also bought from the market, and took them back to the United States.

After much haggling with the Japanese on the terms of the new trade treaty, Perry finally succeeded in concluding the Treaty of Kanagawa in 1854 establishing trade relations between the United States and Japan. In course of the negotiations, the Americans were able to get access for the first time to two trading ports of Hakodate and Shimoda. Once the Treaty was concluded, Perry received Japanese return gifts. Furniture, lacquerware, brocades, apparel, porcelain, handicraft items, household utensils and tools were among them. He himself was given complete sets of Japanese coin, matchlocks, and swords. Before Perry's departure, the Japanese, as per custom, delivered at the shore some two hundred sacks of rice. And four small dogs to the President as a part of the official gift, of which only two could make it to Washington.

In contrast to Macartney's failed mission to China, Perry's mission to Japan was a success in that while the former could get nothing he had hoped for, the latter, by force of gunboat diplomacy, succeeded in concluding a treaty beneficial to the United States. Diplomatic gifts were magnanimously exchanged on both occasions, but substantive outcomes remained vastly different. The British had to wait until another five decades before they could successfully coerce China into accepting their outstanding demands. Under different circumstances similar diplomatic tactics may well bring different outcomes.

Before turning to the contemporary trends of diplomatic gift-giving, let me now refer to two instances of diplomatic gift-giving relative to Nepal, one in the form of quinquennial missions to China from 1792 to 1906, and the other, Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana's visit to England in 1850 as a royal ambassador.

VI. Nepal's Experience in Diplomatic Gift Exchanges:

Gift giving is a long-standing social custom prevalent in Nepal. As far as diplomatic gifts are concerned, they were surely not unknown in the ruling class of people for centuries. Prior to 1950, Nepal had diplomatic relations only with four countries, viz. the U.K., the U.S.A., India and France. Nepal had not yet become a member of the United Nations. And its residential diplomatic missions were located only in London and New Delhi. Besides these, a Nepali Vakeel office was in operation in Lhasa for almost a century, since 1856. The Jaisikotha and the Munshikhana were the two offices which used to look after relations to the north, towards Tibet and China, and to the rest of the world, primarily with British India, respectively.

There were obviously limited interactions on either side, and occasions for diplomatic gift exchanges also seem to have been minimal. Official records are perhaps yet to be fully explored to account for details of such exchanges in a comprehensive manner. But from the limited number of scholarly studies and publications on aspects of relations with China, British India and the UK, we can get a glimpse of the types of diplomatic gifts exchanged between Nepal and these countries on certain occasions.

As early as AD 647, a Nepali envoy is known to have visited Changan with presents for the T'ang emperor (Rose: 11). Details of the 'presents' are perhaps hard to ascertain in view of the lack of archival resources on our side. And that mission from Nepal was a return visit to an earlier Chinese mission (Manandhar and Mishra: 3). In 651, King Narendra Dev sent another mission to China which must also have carried courtesy gifts. But again details are lacking. Historians suggest that the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), which succeeded the Yuan dynasty in China, had established contacts with the Rama family of Patan. And between 1384 and 1427, five Chinese and seven Nepali missions had been exchanged (Rose: 12). Valuable clothes and silver coins were received by Nepal as gift from China while books on Buddhism, horses and miniatures of golden stupas were sent as presents from Nepal (Manandhar and Mishra: 6). The King of Nepal received a seal from the Emperor of China in 1381 and from 1427 presents were regularly exchanged between the two courts. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, three kings of the "Nepal Valley" sent to the Emperor of China a gold leaf of petition and a "tribute" consisting of different products and artifacts (Uprety: 178).

(a) Quinquennial Missions to China and Gift Diplomacy:

Following the defeat of Nepal in the second Nepal-Tibet war of 1792, in which China stood strongly behind Tibet, Nepal had agreed, as one of the terms of peace, to send quinquennial missions to China with gifts for the emperor, who in turn would reciprocate by sending gifts to the Nepali king. Thus, as a treaty obligation gift-giving took an institutionalized form since 1792. And it continued more or less regularly until 1906.

The term *mamuli saugat* (ordinary gifts) was used to designate the presents the Nepali quinquennial missions took to China. Presents to the Emperor included necklaces of corals, *Kimkhap* (cloth of special quality), and special kind of weapons such as guns, *Terrors* (sword), and *Khukuris*. Also included in the list were the different kinds of *masalas* such as *Jayafal*, *Supari*, *Lwang* and *Dalchini* (Manandhar and Mishra: 34). Elephant tusks, rhino horns, guns, *khukuris*, *khudas*, binoculars, coconuts, peanuts, fragrance, silk brocade, bales of cloth of gold etc. were also among the gift items (Manandhar 2001: *passim*). Special gifts were added on special occasions, such as the accession of a new successor to the Chinese throne. In the first two missions of 1792 and 1795, some elephants and horses were also included as Nepali gifts. These were discontinued after the second mission, as desired by the Chinese side apparently because of conveyance difficulties and the costs involved. Manandhar and Mishra

conclude that the value of gifts reciprocated by the Chinese Emperor was many times more in value than that of Nepal. Nepali gift items were mostly repetitive. As for the intent of sending the periodic missions to China, Prime Minister Chandra Samasher's letter to the British Resident Lt. Col. J. Manners Smith on 19 April 1906 clarifies that the presents were 'of not much value, and certainly not in the nature of tribute', and that 'the missions were sent merely to get privileged access to China for commercial advantage'. (Manandhar and Mishra: 89)

As for presents from China, one record shows that "a golden Parwana, 24 pieces of Kochin known as Tachiang Pastung, 4 pieces of Tangtwang Kochin, 4 pieces of blue Mantwang Kochin, 4 pieces of Yanfaichin Kochin, 4 pieces of Chintwang Kochin of Bakkha class, 4 pieces of Tangrung, 8 pieces of Tangrung sheets or carpets, 2 silver tea-pots, 2 silver dishes, 2 Phalachhis, 2 Polis, 4 cups of "usay" colour, 4 cups of uchhai colour, 1 Rui, studded with Sangisan, 2 articles of Sangisan, 1 Rosary of sootoo beads, 2 Tiaochhi fur, 2 Malouchhi fur, 2 yellow dishes, 2 Hundochhis, 2 pairs of large purse, 4 pairs of small purse, and 8 packets of tea" were sent by the Chinese Emperor to King Prithvi Bir Bikram with the 1894 Nepali mission upon its return from Peking. (Manandhar:197).

Likewise, with the leader of the 1906 mission, Kaji Bhairab Bahadur Gadhatola Chhetri, the Chinese Emperor is known to have sent "24 pieces of Kochin known as Tachien Ustwan, 4 pieces of Tangtwang Kochin, 4 pieces of Siantwang Kochin, 4 pieces of Mantlwang Kochin, 4 pieces of Ching Kochin, 4 pieces of Tangrun, 8 pieces of Tangrun sheets or carpets, 2 silver tea-pots, weighing 17 1/5 Taks of silver, 2 silver dishes, weighing 18 Taks of silver, 2 Tamaphopatas, 2 Polisis, 2 pairs cups, 2 woolen articles, 2 pairs cups for milk, 1 Ean Rui, 1 Taotoo, 2 Yangtis, 2 Tiachhi fur, 2 Malochhi fur, 2 Maiyoos, 2 Wondusis, 2 pairs large purse, 4 pairs small purse, 8 packets of tea" as present to King Prithvi Bir Bikram. (Manandhar: 229)

This shows that Chinese return gifts were also mostly repetitive.

Studies have shown that diplomatic gifts in early modern Europe used to be recycled. This must have happened in Asian courts also. For example, one British historian has recently noted that among the gift items given by the Chinese emperor to Macartney in 1793 was 'a pair of boxes of Tibetan sugar' which, she says, had been given by Nepal to the emperor earlier in the year along with elephants, peacocks, guns and swords (Harrison: 87). 'Tibetan sugar' and 'peacocks', however, do not appear in Nepal's gift list of 1792. Baburam Acharya's synoptic list of Nepali gifts to the Chinese emperors also mentions only gold statues of the Buddha, pearl necklaces, beautifully encrusted swords, valuable silk cloths embroidered with gold and silver threads, attractive artifacts of ivories and sandalwood, and rare and valuable goods reflecting Nepali specialities, as well as at one time even elephant (Acharya: 182). These two items do not appear in the gift list compiled by another Nepali research scholar also. (Nepal: 192)

The founder of modern unified Nepal, King Prithvi Narayan Shah, was an unalloyed nationalist and a geo-political realist who saw the need for maintaining a cautious and balanced relations with the neighbours on both sides, north and south, of the country. A reasoned comment of one of the most seasoned diplomats of the century is worth quoting: "For centuries, Nepal skillfully balanced its diplomatic posture between the ruling dynasties in China and those in India- offering letters and gifts that were interpreted as tribute in China but recorded as evidence of equal exchanges in Nepal, then holding out a special tie with China as a guarantee of Nepal's independence vis-a-vis India." (Kissinger: 179).

With British India Nepal didn't have any obligatory gift giving treaty as such as it had with China, but over the years Nepali rulers adopted the practice of pleasing the British rulers in India by offering presents and paying occasional courtesy visits. History, however, tells us that during the Mughal rule in India, the Makawanpur state, which included the terai belt between Mahottari and Parsa, used to send an annual gift (malavajavi or nazarana) of two elephants to them. This practice continued even after the disintegration of the Mughal empire and even when the British came to occupy and establish their rule in Bengal and Bihar. King Prithvi Narayan Shah had agreed to continue this gift-giving practice as a way of keeping the British beyond the territories of the erstwhile Makawanpur state after it was finally won and integrated into his own kingdom of Nepal. (Acharya 2063: 180-183)

The Sugauli Treaty of 1816 formally opened Nepal for British diplomatic representation at the Minister's level and perhaps with it also began the practice of diplomatic gift giving to the British Residents and their masters in India. (Although an earlier treaty of 1801 had provided for keeping Vakeels in each other's court and the British had sent Capt. W. D. Knox as their first Resident to Nepal in 1802, he left Kathmandu in March 1803 and the treaty itself was revoked by them in 1804).

(b) Jang Bahadur's Visit to London and Gift Diplomacy:

Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana's historic visit to London as the King's Ambassador in 1850 was an event of great diplomatic significance for Nepal. He had carried with him a complimentary letter from King Surendra to Queen Victoria and hundreds of gift articles including some rare and valuable ones such as rhino's horn, musk, Khukuri with a rhino-horn handle, Khukuri with ivory handle etc. which he handed her during a courtesy meeting in London on 19 June 1850. The rest of the gift items were later sent to the Buckingham Palace (Rana 2059: 69). Nepali presents were estimated to be worth between a quarter and a half million sterling pounds by the London press reports, perhaps an exaggeration arising out of ignorance or self-gratification. The Queen had given expensive gifts to Jang Bahadur in return, including a revolver, gun, piano, and a crystal statuette of the Queen and her consort Prince Albert. Queen Victoria had also arranged to send a portrait of herself and Prince Albert to King Surendra as present through the British Governor-General in India. (Rana 2059: 199). In those days, even

in physical 'absence' a portrait was believed to symbolize actual 'presence'. While in London, Jang Bahadur met the Queen several times and visited many interesting places and people. And by the time he left he had been so impressed with the British power and prosperity that he remained their life-long friend and supporter. After being a little over a year away from home, Jung Bahadur came back to Kathmandu in February 1851, more enlightened and with a much broader worldview on social and political matters.

Twenty-five years later, he took the opportunity to welcome the Prince of Wales for a hunting excursion in Nepal. Jang knew that the British nobility loved hunting, as did the Ranas themselves. In February 1876, he gave a grand welcome to the Prince of Wales Albert Edwards in Western Nepal for hunting. He accompanied the British Prince for about two weeks in the jungles of Western Nepal where a large number of tigers and other wild animals were shot and killed. The Prince was very pleased and gave Jang Bahadur several types of guns, revolver and other gifts. Jang presented many different species of animals and wild fowls, khukuris, musk, old Nepali gold and silver coins, old weapons, some handmade Nepali household goods etc. to the Prince of Wales in return (Rana 2059: 171,178,179).

An insatiable hunger for foreign titles and decorations was a notable character of the Rana prime ministers. Following the end of the imperial period in China in 1911, the Republic of China had sent at least four missions between 1930 and 1946 with robes and titles and decorations for the Rana rulers. Between 1933 and 1939, during Juddha Shamsheer's rule, medals were received from several European and Asian countries. Even representatives of fascist Italy and Hitler's Germany came to Nepal respectively in 1933 and 1937 with medals of honor to Juddha. Finnish representative also visited Nepal in 1937 to decorate him (Raj: 32-33). It is worth recalling that the maiden recipient of the Nepali medal of 'Ojaswi Rajanya' was none other than the British King in 1934. And the Nepali delegation that had gone to London to formally submit the medal was turned later the same year into the first residential Nepali embassy in London (Pande: 307).

VII. Ambassadorial Gifts, Gratuities and Pensions:

In the early modern period of European diplomacy, the custom of exchanging gifts upon ratification of treaties was practiced throughout Europe. Diplomats usually received snuff boxes and royal portraits set in diamonds upon signing a treaty. Gold chain used to be the most common form of gift for a diplomat at the end of his term (Anderson: 36, Fletcher: 153). In the seventeenth century England, a gilt plate was given as farewell gift to a departing ambassador. A diplomat successful in mediating peace between two belligerent states could expect a handsome reward (Anderson: 51). And that used to be a good attraction for some diplomats' seeking to engage in specially gainful conflict resolution mediations.

But there was no dearth of critics to such practices. Philippe de Commynes (c1447-1511), French diplomat and author, held the view that although foreign ambassadors were not to be trusted, they were to be honourably received and civilly entertained. He also advised that they should be given audience and dispatched as soon as possible and with presents (Berridge 2004: 34-35). Almost a century after Commynes, another French scholar-diplomat Jean de Villiers Hotman (1552-1636) advised ambassadors 'not to receive any gifts and presents' because they 'do oblige, and those that receive them, become slaves to those that give them: much more if they take a pension, or other benefit, in which case there will be either a stain of avarice, or suspicion of treason ...' (Berridge 2004: 79).

From the early fifteenth century, Venice introduced restriction on its ambassadors to accept any foreign gifts and benefices. The Dutch republic did the same since the mid-seventeenth century. In the late sixteenth century Queen Elizabeth I had forbidden her subjects from even wearing foreign insignia. However, in general the role of gifts and gratifications remained substantial throughout the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Anderson: 51). Queen Victoria (r 1837-1901) forbade her diplomats from accepting foreign decorations, except when sent on special complimentary missions to foreign sovereigns. The U.S. constitution prohibits accepting foreign presents or titles by its diplomats and officials. It had once started giving a gold medal and chain to a departing foreign diplomat in the late eighteenth century, but discontinued the practice almost immediately. Lord Palmerston, in 1831, abolished what he called an ancient and unreasonable diplomatic practice of the use of gifts to reward envoys and officials for services rendered in negotiation. At the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the plenipotentiaries agreed not to receive any presents or decorations (Satow: 373).

One scholar has recently argued that in early modern Europe, many courtiers openly received 'pensions' from foreign crowns in return for maintaining friendly relations (Fletcher: 156). And that was also the time when nationality was not considered an essential requirement for diplomatic representation. In the first half of the sixteenth century, 'Henry VIII employed an Italian, Spinelli, as his minister in the Netherlands, and there then existed professional international diplomatists, such as the Pole, Laski, or the Spaniard, Rincon, or the Hungarian Frangipani, who served different masters in turn' (Nicolson: 34).

VIII. Diplomatic Gifts: Some Recent Trends

State visits of heads of state or government and other senior level official visits generate occasions for official gift-giving. The US presidents do it, and so do the British Queen and her Prime Ministers. The US usually prefers its official gifts to be 'most unique, one-of-a-kind type' when given at the presidential level. Nepal's Kings used to present Nepali handicraft, wooden crafts, metal crafts, woolen carpets etc. as gifts for foreign leaders when they visited abroad on invitation. As a new Republic, Nepal's Presidents and Prime Ministers also follow the same practice although elaborate gift exchange

ceremonies are now only a thing of the past. The Protocol Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs handles the managerial side of gift diplomacy in Nepal as in most other countries.

In the US a legal limit of \$2,000 exists for presidential gifts to foreign leaders. Foreign gifts of only minimal value (up to \$390 as of 2020) can be retained by the recipient including the president. All others go to the National Archives and Records Administration, or in the case of live animals, to the park services or a zoo. Even in India gifts received by official delegates during foreign visits go straight to the Toshakhana. Some countries, India included, do not disclose the value of gifts presented to foreign leaders on the ground that disclosure of such information might 'prejudicially affect' bilateral relations. Nepal has no such legal limits for gifts to foreign leaders nor an obligation to submit gifts received from abroad to any specific national unit or agency.

Gifts embody the feelings of amity and respect towards the recipient. The giver feels good when these are acknowledged with appreciation. Failure to do that could be disappointing. This was evident in Prime Minister Juddha Shamsheer Rana's determination to discontinue sending presents to the British Viceroys at the knowledge that some of the gifts sent to them in the past had been auctioned at cheap prices in Delhi. Once he knew that the British were not much interested in gifts, Juddha extended an invitation instead to the new Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, for a shooting excursion in Nepal which the latter accepted with pleasure. And in early December 1938, he came to Thori and enjoyed the game for a week in Nepal.

In more recent times, official Nepali gifts include Nepali arts, crafts, handicraft, Himalayan tea, coffee, metal crafts, statues, woodworks, handmade silk and woolen carpets, Pashmina shawls and other products, khukuris, silverwares etc. During the euphoric days of the establishment of SAARC, Nepal had hosted the Third SAARC Summit in Kathmandu in November 1987. A commemorative gold coin issued to mark the occasion was given as a special present to all the participating Heads of State or Government. Prime Minister Madhav K. Nepal's gift of a piece of 'rock from Mt. Everest' to US President Barack Obama and the U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in September 2009 carried a deep symbolic meaning in the context of global warming and its growing adverse impacts on the Nepali mountain ecosystem and people's livelihood. Nepal has gifted about 30 one-horned rhinos as diplomatic presents to various countries in the last four decades, two pairs of them to China as recently as in 2018.

In the past, live animals used to be among the most chosen of diplomatic gifts although that practice is rapidly declining in recent years. During his historic visit to China in February 1972, President Nixon gave a pair of musk oxen as present to China, and received two Giant Pandas in return. China no longer gives Giant Pandas as diplomatic gifts any more. In 1990, President George H. W. Bush was presented a huge Komodo dragon by President Suharto of Indonesia. India's Ministry of Environment, Forest and

Climate Change prohibits the exchange of animals as diplomatic gifts. This prohibition apparently led Prime Minister Narendra Modi to leave behind a horse presented to him by his Mongolian counterpart in Ulaanbaatar in May 2015. A camel presented to French President Francois Hollande during his official visit to Mali in 2013, which he apparently left in the custody of a local family in Timbuktu, was unfortunately turned into local delicacies by the transitional custodian. Elephants have continued to remain one of the most prized of all diplomatic gifts since the ancient times and President Maithripala Sirisena has been the most recent head of state to present a baby elephant to Prime Minister John Key of New Zealand during the latter's visit to Sri Lanka in February 2016 amid strong protests from the animal rights activists. Animals as diplomatic gift are now on rapid decline and the once compulsive search for competitive magnificence to outdo others in ceremonial extravagance and unbefitting lavishness in diplomatic gift-giving are also becoming a thing of the past.

Diplomatic gift-giving certainly continues as an indispensable tool of diplomacy, but its nature, scale and quality are now guided more by the requirements of diplomatic courtesy and decency rather than as a way of flaunting one's power and prosperity. In fact, the most well-governed democracies of the world appear to be the most prudent diplomatic gift givers today.

IX. Awkward Gifts:

Gift-giving is a sensitive art. Good gift-giving calls for taking full account of the occasion, context and cultural sensitivity of the recipient. Gifts which fail to meet these criteria often turn out to be awkward, embarrassing and even counterproductive. An American former Chief of Protocol warns, 'When gifts fail to match the occasion or the level of relationship, diplomatic relationship may fail along with them. (French: 304).

Sometimes the choice of gift for a specific person or occasion may fail to meet the popular expectation. At his first meeting with the British Queen in 2009, President Barack Obama presented an iPod to the Queen 'loaded with video footage of her visit to the United States in 2007'. The British press was not very appreciative of the present.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's much hyped RESET button initiative of 2009 was almost stillborn when her Russian counterpart pointed out that the English word RESET was wrongly inscribed on the button as PEREGRUZKA (overload) instead of PEREZAGRUZKA (reset). Perhaps it was a premonition of what would happen to the relations of the two countries.

At the 2009 Summit of the Americas held in Trinidad, a book in Spanish presented by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez to President Barack Obama turned out to be about US imperialism and exploitation in Latin America which, as Secretary Clinton later described, could be 'anything but a goodwill gesture'.

Prime Minister David Cameron's gift of a ping-pong table given to President Barack Obama in 2012 was said to have lost much of the initial excitement and value to the recipient when it was found to have been made in China.

Secretary of State John Kerry's gift of 'two large Idaho potatoes' to his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov during a meeting in Paris in January 2014 brought him a return gift of 'two gift bags of tomatoes and potatoes' from the Russian Foreign Minister when they met at Sochi in May 2015.

X. Conclusion:

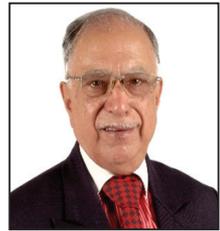
Our discussion so far leads us to the conclusion that gift-giving is a long-established tradition in diplomacy. Well-chosen gifts help to bring the leaders and nations closer to each other by deepening friendship and mutual understanding between them. Whether for forging friendships, deepening ties, easing tensions, or in some cases just as an expression of friendly compliment, gifts carry a great significance in international diplomacy. It is exactly for these reasons that gift-giving remains an indispensable part of the diplomatic ceremonial. 'Precious objects and valued commodities did not merely "move" from one place to another, they were purposefully exchanged across cultural and political boundaries' (Biedermann, Gerritsen and Riello: XV). And the intents behind these purposeful exchanges were most of the time commercial, political and diplomatic. Most diplomatic gifts are not just passive objects, inanimate and ahistorical. They often carry some motifs behind them, or certain meaning and significance reflecting history in a visible form. They are in a way the time capsules of history. Museums in Europe are known to have in their possession many rare and priceless collections of the historically significant diplomatic gift items that were exchanged in the early modern period between the states of Europe, Asia and the Middle East. They can indeed serve as an excellent and irrefutable sources of information for a better understanding of the diplomatic cultures of gift-giving and their political, social and economic implications in general. One author has recently observed, 'Scholarly consideration of gifts in the specific context of diplomacy is relatively rare' (Fletcher: 148). In more recent years a new surge of academic interest in this subject appears to be gaining momentum in an effort to liberate it from the traditional confines of the European diplomatic contexts so as to broaden the horizons of the study in a more inclusive and comprehensive manner. The term 'diplomacy' is historically associated with the task of handling official documents, and 'diplomats' as those who once dealt with diplomas and archives. Museums full of priceless material objects exchanged as diplomatic gifts in the past also have their own archival values for better understanding the history of international diplomacy and the state of contemporary inter-state relations of the time.

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Nepal-China Relations: Towards Strategic Partnership



Sundar Nath Bhattarai

Nepal has the proud privilege of having a close relationship with China from the very early stage of history, which has gradually developed, with the passage of time, and expanded into all conceivable sectors affecting the daily life of the common people; from socio-economic, cultural and religious to infrastructure, industry, energy, tourism, trade, and commerce, among others. This relationship is based on mutual trust, understanding, confidence, respect and cooperation. Historically, this relationship is marked by arduous pilgrimages made by celebrated monks on both sides, like Fa Xian, Hiuen Tsang and Buddhahadra, who made formidable travels across the Himalayas in quest of our common cultural, civilizational and religious heritage which was further enriched by the nuptial relationship of Princess Bhrikuti with King of Tibet Songtsen Gampo, in the 7th century, culminating in the spread of Buddhist religion from Nepal to China. This was followed by the journey of Artist Arniko in the 13th century, who built a chain of outstanding edifices of Nepalese craftsmanship in the form of Pagodas at each place along the path of his journey from Uthaisan, the birthplace of Manjushri, to Beijing, and various other parts of China, and finally up to Ulan Bator during the reign of Yuan dynasty. The vibrant economic linkages established by rows of traders and businessmen between Nepal and South West China (Tibet), since the ancient time of Silk Road and Tea Horse Trail, are exemplary lores of traditional close cultural and civilizational linkage occupying special place in Nepal-China relationship.

With the formal establishment of diplomatic relations in 1955, based on Panchasheel or the basic tenets of Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, bilateral relations between Nepal and China attained a new height, and became more secure, substantive and intimate. It was further strengthened by the launching of various cooperative efforts between the two countries. The most remarkable part of this relationship was that it was, since its early stage, nurtured by the top leadership of both countries, past and present, from Chairman Mao, Premier Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping and others, including President Xi; and on the Nepalese side by former Kings, Mahendra and Birendra, and leaders like Tanka Prasad Acharya and B. P. Koirala and others in succession, including Puspa Kamal Dahal and much-talked- about visit of K.P. Sharma Oli in 2016. Mr. Oli's visit, made in the immediate aftermath of a devastating earthquake followed by the shocking blockade by our southern neighbor, culminated in 12 important agreements

of cooperation with China in different areas of crucial importance ranging from trade and transit, road and railways, aviation and IT connectivity, development of hydro power, mining exploration and tourism.

Mr. Oli's second visit, in his capacity as the Prime Minister of a new stable government elected with a large majority of people's votes, and as President of newly united Communist Party of Nepal, had its own importance. His one-to-one parley followed by official meeting with President Xi Jinping, besides promoting friendship and understanding at the highest level, offered an important opportunity to focus on implementation of previous agreements and entering into various new ones in the important domain of long term perspective including energy, cross-border transmission lines, industries, irrigation, and petroleum storage facilities, among others, in both governmental and private sectors, and finalization of the agreement on trade and transit. The visit was also instrumental in garnering support from Chinese business and industrial communities for investment in Nepal, promotion of financial back-up institutions like banks and promotion of Chinese tourism in Nepal.

We have carefully watched the important outcome of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the largest political party in the world with about 9 million members, and epoch making decisions of the 19th CPC National Congress which has put China on solid, strong hold of both domestic as well as global political developments.

Secretary General Xi Jinping, who was re-elected for the second five-year term, made a clarion call "to secure a decisive victory in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects by 2021", the centenary year of the foundation of CPC, and strive to develop itself as a "prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious and beautiful country" by the year 2049, the centenary year of the establishment of the People's Republic and achieve the rejuvenation of Chinese dream of Socialist Modernization. China believes that rejuvenation of China and its march towards prosperity are expected to bear fruit not only for China and its people but also for the shared benefit of mankind as a whole.

The endorsement by NPC of the constitutional amendment lifting the limit of two 5-year terms of the Presidency has opened up the possibility of continuity of President Xi's leadership at the top beyond 2023. This decision has put President Xi as the second topmost leader in the history of the communist movement of the People's Republic of China, allowing him the same privilege as that of Chairman Mao for lifelong Presidency. This demonstrates the strong confidence of the Chinese people in President Xi Jinping who has proved his able governance capability to steer the country forward with his farsighted vision and firm determination. This change is believed to ensure long term stability and China's continued success in its march towards rejuvenation of Chinese

dream of socialist modernization by achieving two centenary goals, and enable it to play an effective role in global affairs and help build a favorable environment towards peace, stability and development.

The most important dimension of the Chinese march towards prosperity is its solidarity with all countries of the world, especially the developing ones, and the neighboring countries, in particular. The principle of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, inclusiveness and the policy of forging friendship and partnership, and strengthening of cooperation and solidarity have been adopted by China as tenets of its present day policy of foreign relations as propounded by President Xi Jinping. This has gained wide admiration and is greatly appreciated. President Xi's concept of "A Community With a Shared Future for Mankind in pursuance of the policy of cooperation of win-win reciprocity among nations" has made China a congenial, friendly, cooperative and benign global power in the present context. This concept which has also been adopted by the United Nations and other international and regional organizations envisages the need for concerted actions among nations.

In the present context of Nepal-China relations, following the signing of MOU on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by Nepal, the wholehearted attention of the Nepalese people is drawn towards the successful implementation of BRI and Nepal's useful and beneficial participation in it. The grand vision and concept of BRI is, no doubt, an unprecedented vision of President Xi Jinping, unparalleled in human history, which aims to bring together the nations of the world in combined efforts for common development and shared benefits through closer cooperation and larger connectivity, in five different but related areas of infrastructure, trade, finance, environment and people to people relations, on a permanent footing. BRI has, as a matter of fact, already become a force by itself which will relentlessly be ever advancing for a long time to come, as it has now stood out as an alternative and incomparable form of globalization, in its true sense and applicability, against the rise of protectionist trend. Nepal has adhered to BRI in view of its unique benefits to its national interest, in spite of the persistent clamour against the concept as China's debt-trap diplomacy, which it considers as propagandist and fallacious, and apathy towards it of our southern neighbor, India, which is apparently political in motive.

Nepal's added importance to Belt and Road Initiative became evident with the participation of President Bidya Devi Bhandari in the second BRI Summit for international cooperation, which was highlighted by the participation of more than 30 Heads of State and Government, including the signing of MoU on BRI by the Prime Minister of Italy, an important member of European Union, and more than 100 international organizations. Mrs. Bhandari's visit, which was also the first State Visit by Nepalese President to China, provided an important occasion for free and frank exchange of views on matters of mutual interest at the highest level, which also culminated in the signing of several agreements, most important of which was the long sought after Protocol on Transit

which provided Nepal the right of access to 4 sea ports and 3 land dry ports of China. This was one of the most important achievements for land-locked Nepal with its sole dependence on India alone for transit trade. Another landmark outcome of her visit was the agreement of Round Table Conference of BRI, composed of Heads of State and Government, to enlist the project of Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network with Cross-border Railway between Nepal and China, as deliverable projects of BRI .

In the mindset of Nepalese people, the Belt and Road Initiative has now become synonymous with railway connectivity between Nepal and China. In view of the ongoing project of railway construction up to Keyrong, recently designated as an international port of transit, and which is scheduled to be completed by 2025, together with the assurance coming from a dignitary like President Xi, expressed during his talk with Prime Minister Oli, and as inscribed in the list of important agreements signed during President Xi's October-2019 visit to Kathmandu, for undertaking a DPR for the railway's extension to Kathmandu, there is no doubt that this vision of railway connectivity between China and Nepal will, sooner than later, be turned into reality. This project, when realized, will revitalize our age old vibrant cultural, religious and commercial relationship that existed in the past between Nepal and China, and see its re-emergence in actual practice. On the other hand, this connectivity is certain to open up the vast region of China to South Asia and Central Asia bringing about tremendous socio-economic and political transformation of the region, adjacent to Nepal as a whole, from which this country will benefit tremendously and to a greater extent. China has been ceaselessly extending generous assistance to Nepal for its development even in times of crisis and pledging support for its efforts to safeguard its independence and sovereignty for which the Nepalese people are extremely grateful.

The visit of President Xi Jinping to Nepal held on October 12-13, 2019 which was followed by Xi-Modi tête-à-tête at Mamallapuram in Chennai, Tamil Nadu as a follow-up of Wuhan Summit, was an event of paramount importance in the annals of Nepal-China relations. Xi-Modi Summit had its own importance contributing to the building of trust and cooperation between two rising economic powers of Asia, a significant factor conducive to peace and stability in the region. Xi's visit to Nepal, immediately after Xi-Modi Summit, has drawn great regional and global attention and can be said to have boosted Nepal's regional standing. It was a euphoric event for Nepal. President Xi was accorded a profusely warm and unprecedented rousing welcome in Nepal with the presence of President, Vice-President, Prime Minister and Heads of political parties at the receiving line at the airport, a gesture which is rear in present day diplomatic practice. The visit by President Xi took place after a gap of 23 years preceded by that of President Jiang Zemin in 1996. It has enhanced Nepal-China relations to a new height and has ushered them into a new era elevating them from a "comprehensive to the strategic level of relationship", as affirmed by President Xi himself. The President vowed to extend cooperation to Nepal to realize its dream of becoming a land-linked country,

to help realize in all possible ways the trans-himalayan multi-dimensional connectivity with cross-border railways, to actively pursue the project of Keyrong-Kathmandu tunnels, to upgrade the Araniko Highway to its full operation in various stages, to protect the environment of common Himalayan region and help Nepal in all possible areas, including investment and tourism. He also opined that there is no problem in Nepal-China relations except only Friendship. He also stressed the importance of implementation of projects in time.

The visit was marked by the signing of 20 Agreements, MoUs and Understanding and release of a 14-point Joint Communiqué, which has opened up new vistas for important collaboration in various vital areas of common interest. The visit was undoubtedly successful in carrying forward the friendly relations towards much brighter and fruitful future, with long term positive implications. All these are indicative of ever growing cooperation and strategic relationship expected to bind Nepal and China together for a long time to come.

Nepal has very profound and extensive socio-cultural and economic relations with both China and India and expects to benefit from the progress that both are making all along by learning the lessons from their experiences. Nepal, situated between China and India, has opted to adopt a policy of maintaining a balanced relationship with China and India on their separate individual merits by putting its own vital interest at the core.

The crucial factor is how we proceed in ascertaining and pursuing our core national interest. The South Asian geo-political situation is in a state of perpetual change. The way in which China is rising as an effective regional power with global influence, by increasingly developing and promoting its soft power diplomacy, has established it as a heavyweight power with which all South Asian countries including India, have to reckon in all possible ways. India's progress, though simultaneously on the rise, does not yet match with that of China. The manner in which India is carrying out its bilateral relations with its neighbors in South Asia, as in the case of Nepal, which had to bear the brunt of several economic blockades and current high handed hegemonic behavior aimed at occupying sovereign territories such as Kalapani-Limpiyadhura by unilaterally changing the official map of the country, leading to a blatant encroachment upon its neighbor's territories, is reprehensible.

Time has come for us to think about what actually constitutes our vital national interest. Would it be the open border with India which EPG is reported to have recommended for regulation, which is in want of urgent implementation? Or would it be the petroleum pipeline of which the key will be in the undependable hands of India, or whether it would be the seven cross-border railways, now under expeditious construction between Nepal and India, which may perhaps carry more Indian migrants to already overcrowded Nepal's Terai with less goods and cargos. Or it may be on the other side where China stands with open arms, agility and preparedness to carry forward its

motto of shared benefit and win-win reciprocity in more real sense. In this ongoing context, when we think of China, which has successfully and practically pursued a policy of good neighborliness with non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and has always been unequivocally supporting our efforts in safeguarding our sovereignty and independence, it would not be an over statement to say that there is ample ground for China to earn and win our confidence in their favour. For us, strong and supportive relationship with China is a dire necessity not only for our own development but also for our survival. This, I think, also explains why Nepal has remained indifferent to the US call for playing a central role in Indo-Pacific partnership, including endorsement of MCC. Nepal's response expressed by our Foreign Minister, in the first place, has subtly given sufficient indication of its rejection to involve itself in strategic alliance aimed at containing China's regional role and its rise as global power. In addition, the MCC, having undergone a thorough study and review by the NCP party-committee, headed by former Prime Minister, Mr. Jhala Nath Khanal, has come out with a conditional recommendation, which is expected to guide, to some extent, Nepal's future course of foreign relations, besides its approach to US sponsored Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC).

The upgradation of Nepal-China relation from comprehensive to strategic level is interpreted as emphasizing the profundity of socio-economic relations rather than a strategic alliance with military implication. But we should not perhaps hesitate to give serious thought to promoting the strategic relationship with China in a somewhat more extensive manner. Our first defense cooperation agreement with China (an understanding on military cooperation) was signed in 1988. Since then, there has been gradual increase in cooperation between China and our security institutions, both military and armed police force. So far, it is in the form of training on both sides, joint military exercises, exchange of visits at both higher and lower levels, grant assistance and supply of equipment and military hardware for peace keeping operations, disaster management and rehab activities. China's contribution of a modern and well-equipped national academy for armed police force, and cooperation, now under consideration, in establishing a defense university for Nepal Army (NA) and recent Agreement on Border Management are appreciable and positive developments in Nepal-China defense cooperation. The joint communiqué issued during President Xi's visit has emphasized the continuation of strengthening defense cooperation between Nepal and China. China's contribution to upgrading the capability of NA so as to make it self-reliant is encouraging and, as per the demand of the time, there is ample scope for further enhancement of defense cooperation between Nepal and China in days to come as per our mutual need and interest.

The Concept of "China-India Plus" put forth by President Xi as a cooperation model to South Asia has given rise to wide scale debate in Nepal. The concept seems to have linkage with his broader concept of shared benefit and intended to give space to the views of the country or countries on what China and India discuss and decide. Had this

concept been adopted and applied while making a deal on Lipulek, it would definitely have yielded positive outcome for Nepal. The concept of “Plus” does not necessarily imply to limit to one alone but may also involve more than one country, depending upon the scope of cooperation and nature of issues involved. The concept calls for an in-depth analysis. Before passing final judgment on the viability of this concept put forth by President Xi, serious thought needs to be given to its importance and wider implications.

At this critical moment when China and the world are being badly hit and ravaged by novel corona virus on such an extensive scale, all out efforts made by the Chinese nation in combating and containing the virus, in the shortest possible time, in spite of all politically motivated propagandist rumours and blames labeled against it, have proven to be highly successful. The call made by President Xi, in his online address to the 75th anniversary of UNGA for global multilateral coordination and collaboration in combating the virus and lifting the world to post-pandemic recovery and socio-economic development and his commitment to offer the Covid-19 vaccine developed by China as ‘global public goods’, ensuring its accessibility and affordability to the developing countries, were widely received with tremendous appreciation. In addition, China’s determined efforts, in the midst of uncertainty caused by Covid pandemic, to achieve its ambitious goal of eradicating absolute poverty from China by the end of this year (2020), has attracted worldwide attention and appreciation from most of the world leaders, including UN Secretary General. If successful, it will not only bring about the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goal of poverty alleviation by 10 years in advance but also would be in itself a miraculous achievement of this century. It shows that the legitimate role that China has been playing in matters of international concern has undoubtedly enhanced its leadership stature to a global height.

China, which has remained a benign, cooperative and all-weather friend of Nepal, with its rise as an effective and influential global power, in our next door neighborhood, is a boon for us. Nepal is an immediate neighbor of both China and India with common and profound socio-cultural and religious affinities and bondage. There can be no doubt about Nepal's sincere aspiration to forge ahead together with both its neighbors on the path of progress and prosperity for our mutual benefit and wellbeing of our people. Let our conscience of goodwill, cooperation and togetherness prevail in real sense so that we could march, hand in hand, in the spirit of वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्, that is, a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind.

OBITUARIES

We are sad to lose a number of prominent figures in recent years who guided and contributed to Nepal's foreign policy and diplomacy, and represented the country. We appreciate their contributions, pay tribute to all of them, and express our solidarity with the bereaved families.

The AFCAN family is, in particular, distressed to note with profound sorrow and grief that five senior diplomats of repute and members of AFCAN, including three who successively guided the organization as Presidents and left an indelible imprint through their sagacious leadership, have passed away during the last three years. With rich experience earned during their long diplomatic innings, they served the country as accomplished diplomats and earned name and fame through their hard work, knowledge and wisdom. We extend sincere tributes to them and extend heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families.



Keshav Raj Jha (July 15, 1939–August 20, 2018)

Late Ambassador Keshav Raj Jha joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) in 1966. Before joining the Ministry, he had served for a year as a lecturer of Political Science at a Government College in Kathmandu. During his long diplomatic career, he served in Bonn, then capital of the Federal Republic of Germany, Washington DC and New York. In the Ministry, he handled various responsibilities, including Chief of Protocol before he was appointed as Nepal's Ambassador to France in 1993. He retired from the ambassadorial assignment in 1997. An energetic person with excellent public relations and broader contact, he was also President of the Nepal Council of World Affairs. He authored a book on Nepal-Germany relations. An MA in Political Science and a Bachelor of Law from Tribhuvan University, he leaves behind his spouse, Gyanu Jha, and one son and one daughter.

The AFCAN family deeply regrets that no conclusive result has come so far on the investigation of the death of Ambassador Jha, who was found dead in a mysterious circumstance at his residence at Kuriyagaon, Thapathali, Kathmandu.



Prabal Shumshere JB Rana (February 16, 1939–June 21, 2019)

Late Ambassador Prabal Shumshere Rana joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1964. This was his fourth choice of career after army, agriculture and education, on the recommendation of Foreign Secretary Ambassador Jharendra Narayan Singha. His diplomatic assignments included those in Nepal's embassies in Karachi, Rome, New York and London. He was also Director in the SAARC Secretariat. In the Ministry, he served in various divisions, including as Deputy Chief of Protocol. Rana was appointed as Nepal's Ambassador to the United Kingdom in 2003, where he served till 2006.

He and his father General Kiran Shumshere became the first father-son duo to serve in the same station as Nepal's Ambassador. A sophisticated person with proven expertise on protocol, ceremonial matters and even interior decoration, Rana also served as Adviser to MoFA during the SAARC Summit held in Kathmandu in 2002. A product of highly acclaimed academic institutions, Bishop Cotton School, Shimla; St. Stephen's College, New Delhi; and University College, London, he had degrees in History and Diplomatic History. Late Rana's spouse- Shanti Rana- predeceased her husband 23 years ago. He leaves behind two sons.



Puskar Man Singh Rajbhandari (August 15, 1945–September 25, 2020)

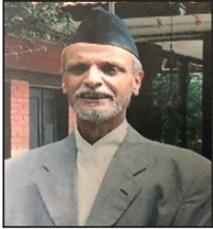
Late Ambassador Puskar Man Singh Rajbhandari joined MoFA in 1969 after his brief stint as a journalist at The Rising Nepal, Nepal's only broadsheet English daily of the time. During his long diplomatic career, he served in different capacities in Nepal's diplomatic missions in Pakistan, Russia, China, and Thailand. At the headquarters, he headed various divisions and also served as spokesperson of MoFA before he was appointed as Nepal's Ambassador to Pakistan in 2003, where he served with distinction till 2006. Rajbhandari was a popular diplomat and was instrumental in establishing GRAHM (Group of Residential Asian Heads of Missions) in Islamabad during his ambassadorial assignment. An MA in Political Science, he was known for his wider public relations, strong zeal for hard work and penchant for institution building, including the Institute of Foreign Affairs and the AFCAN. Rajbhandari leaves behind his spouse, Bhuwan Rajbhandari, and three daughters and a son.



Dr. Singha Bahadur Basnyat (May 2, 1940–February 4, 2018)

Late Ambassador Dr. Singha Bahadur Basnyat was a versatile diplomat having joined the MoFA in 1966 after serving in the ministries of Development, Home and Education following his entry into the government service as Section Officer in 1961. At the headquarters, he handled various responsibilities in various divisions. First posted to New Delhi from 1966 to 1970, he served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Washington DC twice, 1975-80 and 1984-89. Following his retirement from government service, Dr. Basnyat was appointed Ambassador to the United Kingdom and served in London during the period 1997-2003. He had good academic credentials in the form of Masters' degrees in Political Science (Tribhuvan University), International Affairs (Columbia University) and Ph.D. from George Washington University writing a thesis on Nepal-USA relations, 1947-1987. He has also authored a book on the life and work of his brother Khagendra Bahadur Basnyat, who dedicated his life to the service of differently able persons.

Dr. Basnyat was a popular figure in terms of other activities, too. An avid sportsman and a man of amiable disposition with his nickname Shanta, he was a national champion of various games like Badminton, Snooker and Tennis. He was also the chef de mission of Nepal to the Montreal Olympics in 1976. Dr. Basnyat also made his mark in the field of violin and vocal music having released a music cassette, Samjhanama Shrutika Lahar. He leaves behind his spouse, Princess Jotshana Rajya Laxmi Basnyat, a daughter and two sons.



Pradip Kumar Khatiwada (February 15, 1950-July 31, 2017)

Late Ambassador Pradip Kumar Khatiwada entered government service in 1975 after a short association with the academic field at the College of Education under Tribhuvan University. After serving in various departments and organizations under the Cabinet Secretariat, the ministries of Education and General Administration, and the Central Bureau of Statistics, he was transferred to the Foreign Service in 1984. At the headquarters, he discharged his service in various divisions. Khatiwada was posted to New Delhi (twice), Bonn/Berlin and Washington DC before being appointed Ambassador to Bangladesh. He served in Dhaka from 2007 to 2011. He completed Masters' degrees in Statistics and Education from Tribhuvan University. He has written three books including a treatise on Research Methodology. Besides, he has co-authored a book on Nepal-India relations specially pertaining to the period of 1989-90. Though born at Maligaon, Kathmandu, his father Gopinath Khatiwada, who served as Hakim (head) of the Land Revenue Office in Chitwan, built a house at Chitwan. The area is famous as Hakim Chowk after his father. Late Khatiwada leaves behind his spouse, Sarita Upraity Khatiwada.

(This article of obituaries is authored by Amb. Dr. Madan Kumar Bhattarai)

Members of the Association of Former Career Ambassadors of Nepal (AFCAN) (as of November 2020)

S.N.	Name	Major Positions held	Email ID
1	Mrs. Ambika Manandhar Luintel	Ambassador in Paris	luambika@hotmail.com
2	Mr. Arjun Bahadur Thapa	Foreign Secretary, SAARC Secretary General, Ambassador in Abu Dhabi	abthapa13@yahoo.com
3	Mr. Arun Prasad Dhital	Ambassador in Pretoria	arundhital@yahoo.com
4	Mr. Badri Prasad Khanal	Ambassador in Riyadh	
5	Mr. Bhagirath Basnet	Ambassador in Dhaka	bhagirath_51@live.com
6	Dr. Dinesh Bhattarai	PR/Ambassador to UN in Geneva; Adviser to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs	dineshbhattarai@gmail.com
7	Mr. Dipak Dhital	PR/Ambassador to UN in Geneva	dhital.dipak@gmail.com
8	Mr. Durga Bhattarai	Foreign Secretary, PR/ Ambassador to UN in New York	durgapbhattarai@gmail.com
9	Gopi Nath Dawadi	Ambassador in Cairo	gndawadi@hotmail.com
10	Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya	Foreign Secretary, PR/ Ambassador to UN in Geneva and New York, UN-USG & High Representative for LDCs	gyanacharya@hotmail.com
11	Mr. Hari Kumar Shrestha	Ambassador in Dhaka	hkshrestha@hotmail.com
12	Indra Bahadur Singh	Ambassador in Paris	
13	Mr. Janak Bahadur Singh	Ambassador in Bangkok, PR to UNESCAP	jbsingh41@hotmail.com
14	Mr. Kedar Bhakta Shrestha	Foreign Secretary, Ambassador in Brussels and Washington DC	kaybeeshan11@gmail.com
15	Dr. Khaga Nath Adhikari	Ambassador in Bangkok; PR to UNESCAP	knadhikari@yahoo.com
16	Mr. Leela Prasad Sharma	Ambassador in Moscow	lilasharma999@gmail.com

17	Dr. Madan Kumar Bhattarai	Foreign Secretary, Ambassador in Berlin and Tokyo, Advisor to the President on Foreign Affairs and Diplomacy	kutniti@gmail.com
18	Mr. Madhuvan Prasad Paudel	Ambassador in Kuwait City	madhubanp@gmail.com
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21	Mr. Mukti Nath Bhatta	Ambassador in Copenhagen	muktibhatta@hotmail.com
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23	Mr. Paras Ghimire	Ambassador in Yangon	ghimireparas2017@gmail.com
24	Mr. Pradhumna Bikram Shah	Ambassador in Brasilia	pbshah@live.com
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27	Mr. Ramesh Prasad Khanal	Ambassador in Berlin	Rmsh.khanal@gmail.com
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30	Mr. Suresh Prasad Pradhan	Ambassador in Bonn	sureshpradhan@gmail.com

About the Contributors

Dr. Dinesh Bhattarai

Born in Arghakhachi in 1953, Dr. Dinesh Bhattarai graduated from the Banaras Hindu University, India and obtained Master's Degree in Public Administration and Bachelor of Law from the Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. He did Post Graduate Diploma in International Relations and Development from the Institute of Social Studies (ISS), the Hague. He holds Ph.D. Degree in International Relations from the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi. Dr. Bhattarai joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1983. He was First Secretary (Political Affairs) at the Embassy of Nepal in New Delhi from 1991-1994, and Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Nepal in Washington D.C. from 1998-2003. Dr. Bhattarai was appointed Nepal's Ambassador/Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Geneva in 2009 and Ambassador to the Swiss Confederation with concurrent accreditation to the Republic of Italy and the Republic of Croatia. During his assignment in Geneva, he headed the group of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) within the UN system from 2009-2012. Dr. Bhattarai was Foreign Affairs Adviser to the Prime Ministers of Nepal in 2014-2015 and 2017-2018. Currently, he is a Faculty member at the Institute of Crisis Management Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu.

Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya

Born in Kathmandu, Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya is a former Foreign Secretary (2007-2009) and Nepal's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to UN and WTO in Geneva (2003-2007) and Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations, New York (2009- 2012). Mr. Acharya was educated from Tribhuvan University. He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1983 and served in Nepal's diplomatic missions in Egypt and Germany as Deputy Chief of Mission. In the Ministry, he headed various Divisions, including South Asia, Europe and the Americas and Regional Organizations as well as Economic Relations and Coordination Divisions, and was also the Spokesman of the Ministry. Mr. Acharya was a UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS (September 2012-April 2017). Currently, he is the Chair, Environment SAWTEE Centre for Sustainable Development, Kathmandu, and Policy Fellow, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Kathmandu.

Mr. Hari Kumar Shrestha

Born in Gorkha, Mr Hari Kumar Shrestha graduated from Trichandra College and holds a Master's Degree in Economics from Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. He obtained Diploma training (International Relations and Development Diplomacy) from the German Foundation for International Development (DSE), Berlin, Germany (1989), and did Executive Course on International Relations and Security Studies at Asia Pacific

Center for Security Studies (APCSS), Hawaii (1997). He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1983. During his diplomatic career, he served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Nepal's diplomatic missions: Moscow (1991-1995), London (1999-2003), and Kuala Lumpur (2005-2009). In the Ministry, he was assigned to various Divisions, and headed South Asia Division before he was appointed Nepal's ambassador to Bangladesh (2011-2015). Mr. Shrestha loves writing travelogues, and has published a collection of travel essays in the form a book in Nepali entitled 'Maitri Express'.

Mr. Kedar Bhakta Shrestha

Born in Kathmandu on 18 January 1938, Mr. Kedar Bhakta Shrestha is a former Foreign Secretary and Nepal's former Ambassador to the EU and Benelux countries (1997-2002) and the United States of America (2004-2006). Mr. Shrestha graduated from Tri-Chandra College in 1955 and obtained Master's Degree in Political Science & International Affairs from the University of Bombay in 1959. He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1964. During his diplomatic career, Mr. Shrestha was first posted to the to-be-established embassy in Bonn in 1965. He served as First Secretary in Nepal's Permanent Mission to the UN, New York from 1973-77, and Counsellor and Deputy Chief of Mission in Nepal's Embassy in Washington. D.C from 1980-84. In the Ministry, he was assigned to various Divisions and headed North-East and South East Asia Divisions. He was Nepal's First Director in the SAARC Secretariat of Joint Secretary rank, where he worked from 1987-1992. Mr Shrestha was appointed as Foreign Secretary in 1994 and served till 1997 before his ambassadorial assignment to the EU.

Dr. Khaga Nath Adhikari

Born in Palpa in 1960, Dr. Khaga Nath Adhikari obtained Master's Degree in English from Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu (1989), and did MIP (Master of International Politics) from ULB, Brussels (1999). He holds Ph. D. (International Relations) from Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad (2016). He got diplomatic trainings from the Oxford University, UK (1995-96) and the Asia Pacific Centre for Security Studies, Hawaii (2004). He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1988. During his diplomatic career, his assignments include: Consul, Consulate General in Lhasa, Tibet, PRC (1991-94), First Secretary, Brussels (1997-2001), Counsellor/Minister Counsellor, Islamabad (2005-9), and Minister/DCM, New Delhi (2010-14). In the Ministry, he worked under many Divisions, and headed Administration Division; Policy Planning, Monitoring and Research Division; and also served as Spokesperson of the Ministry. Dr. Adhikari was appointed Nepal's Ambassador to Thailand and PR to UNESCAP (2015-2019), with concurrent accreditation to Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Singapore and Vietnam. He is the author of a book: *Myth and Reality, Tibet and the Nepalese People There*, 1997, and has contributed numerous articles in journals, magazines and newspapers. Dr. Adhikari is currently a Faculty member at the Department of International Relations and Diplomacy, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu.

Dr. Madan Kumar Bhattarai

Born on 1 December 1954 at Koteswar, Kathmandu, Dr. Madan Kumar Bhattarai is a former Foreign Secretary (2009-2011) and Nepal's former Ambassador to Germany (2004-2009) and Japan (2011-2015). He obtained Master's Degrees in Political Science, and Public Administration from Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. He holds Ph.D. and D.Litt. (International Relations) Degrees from Jadavpur University, Kolkata. Dr. Bhattarai joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1977 after a brief stint in *The Rising Nepal* daily. He served in the Ministry in various capacities, including Chief of North-East Asia, South-East Asia & Pacific; South Asia; SAARC; Europe-America; United Nations; and Administration Divisions and also worked as Spokesperson of the Ministry. After his ambassadorial tenure, he was appointed as Expert on Foreign Affairs to the President of Nepal (2016-18). He has authored books, including *Diplomatic History of Nepal*, *Indo-Nepal Relations for Seventy Years*, and *Nepalese Parliament: An Overview*, in English, and *Pararaashtrakaa Paatra* and *Pararaashtrakaa Prashaasak* (to be published soon). His hobbies include (a) to explore, study and analyse archives, documents and other materials particularly pertaining to Nepal's foreign relations, (b) to interact with experts and senior people with proven experience and expertise relating to Nepal and foreign policy, and (c) to visit places including cultural and religious sites. Dr. Bhattarai is a Visiting Fellow, Department of International Relations and Diplomacy, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. He is married to Mrs. Ambika Bhattarai and the couple has one son and one daughter.

Mr. Madhuban Prasad Paudel

Born at Lamatar, (Thulaghar), Lalitpur in 1951, Mr. Paudel obtained Master's Degree in History and Culture, and Bachelor in Law from Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. He also holds Diploma training (International Relations and Development Diplomacy) from the German Foundation for International Development (DSE), Berlin, Germany (1988), and Diploma in International Relations and Security Studies from Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS), Hawaii (2003). He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1978. During his diplomatic career, he served as Second Secretary, Embassy of Nepal in Dhaka (1982-1986); Consul, Nepal's Consulate General in Kolkata (1991-1995); Director, SAARC Secretariat (1999-2002); Charge d'Affaires, Embassy of Nepal, Abu Dhabi, UAE (2004-2006); and Deputy Permanent Representative, Nepal's Permanent Mission to UN, New York (2007-2009). He was appointed Nepal's Ambassador to Kuwait (2009-2014). Mr. Paudel is well-known figure in the contemporary Nepali literature and has authored seven books of collection of short stories.

Mr. Madhu Raman Acharya

Born in Udaypur, Mr. Madhu Raman Acharya is a former Foreign Secretary (2002-05), and Nepal's former Ambassador to Bangladesh (1998-2001) and Ambassador/Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations, New York (2005-2009). He obtained higher education from Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu and holds a Master's Degree each in science and public administration and graduate diploma in law. Mr. Acharya began his career in Nepal's civil service as a Section Officer in the Ministry of Home in 1983. Before joining the civil service, Mr Acharya served as Assistant Lecturer at his alma mater—Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu. He was promoted to the Assistant Secretary in 1989 and served in that capacity and Under Secretary in the Ministry of Finance until 1996. During the 1990s, he also served in United Nations missions in Cambodia, South Africa and Liberia. He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as Joint Secretary in 1996 and was in charge of the Administration Division. In 1997-1998, he was Deputy Chief of Mission in New Delhi. He also served as Director at the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq (2010 -2011). Mr. Acharya is the author of a few books, including *The Talking Points* (e-book, 2020), *Nepal Worldview* (2019), *Business of Bureaucracy* (1996, fourth edition 2019) and *Nepal: Culture Shift* (2002).

Mr. Mohan Krishna Shrestha

Born in Kathmandu, Mr. Mohan Krishna Shrestha holds Master's degrees in Economics and Political Science from Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1983. During his diplomatic career, he served in Nepal Embassies in Bangkok, Tokyo (twice) in different capacities, and as Charge d' Affaires a.i in Abu Dhabi. In the Ministry, he was assigned to various Divisions and served as Chief of Protocol before he was appointed Ambassador of Nepal to France (2010-2014), with concurrent accreditation to Greece, Monaco, Portugal and Spain as well as Permanent Delegate of Nepal to UNESCO. Mr. Shrestha is the author of the book *Kutniti Ma Teen Dashak (Three Decades in Diplomacy)*, 2015. Its English version was published from London in April 2018. He is the Founder President of the Center for Diplomacy and Development (CDD), an independent think tank established in February 2018. He often writes in local newspapers on the issues of topical importance. Proficient in Japanese, French and Spanish languages, Mr. Shrestha is an avid traveller and has visited 74 countries of the world.

Dr. Niranjana Man Singh Basnyat

Born on 25 July 1955 in Kathmandu, Dr, Niranjana Man Singh Basnyat obtained Master's Degree in management from Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu (1980) and Diploma in International Relations from International Institute of Public Administration (IIAP), Paris (1989).

He holds Ph. D. Degree in International Relations from Centre for Diplomatic and Strategic Studies, School of Higher International Studies, Paris, France (2008). He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1986. During his diplomatic career, he served as First Secretary, Nepal's Permanent Mission to the UN (1993-1996); Consul, Nepal's Consulate General, Hong Kong (2000-2002); Counsellor/Deputy Chief of Mission at Nepal's Embassy, Paris (2003-2007), and Director, SAARC Secretariat (2009-12). In the Ministry, he was assigned to various Divisions, including South Asia, Multilateral Economics Relations, and Protocol Division. Dr. Basnyat was Chief of Protocol (2012-13) before being appointed Nepal's Ambassador to Malaysia (2013-2018), with concurrent accreditation to Indonesia and the Philippines. He is the President, Lumbini Research Centre for Understanding and Peace (2016). Fluent in French and Spanish, he is the author of *Role of Shreepali Basnyat in the Unification of Nepal* (an anthology of historical account), 2019.

Mr. Paras Ghimire

Born in 1956 in Biratnagar, Mr. Paras Ghimire holds a degree of Masters in Business Administration (MBA) from Tribhuvan University. He also holds a Diploma in International Relations from the University of Paris, France (1990). He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1983. During his diplomatic career, he served in Nepal's diplomatic missions in New Delhi (1991-1995), New York (1997-1999), and Tokyo (2003-2007) in different capacities. In the Ministry, he worked under various Divisions, including South Asia, North East Asia, and Multilateral Economic Affairs Division. He was appointed Nepal's Ambassador to Myanmar in 2012, where he served till 2016.

Dr. Rambhakta P. B. Thakur

Born on 21 December 1949 in Birgunj, Dr. Rambhakta P. B. Thakur holds post graduate degrees in Commerce and Economics from Tribhuvan University, Kathamandu and is also a Law graduate. He obtained M.A. in International Economic Relations (Paris), and a Ph.D Degree (North South Cooperation & Foreign Aid in Nepal, (Patna University, India). Dr. Thakur, who entered the Government Civil Service in 1975, joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1977. During his diplomatic career, he served in Nepal's embassies in Beijing (1982-84), Paris (1988-1993), New Delhi (1995-1998), and Dhaka (1998-99) in different capacities. In the Ministry, he worked under various Divisions and also served as the Chief of Protocol. He was appointed Nepal's Ambassador to Egypt in (2005-2010), with concurrent accreditation to South Africa, Lebanon, and Cyprus. Dr. Thakur was later appointed as advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2011, and as Election Commissioner in 2013. Married with Prof. Usha Thakur, Dr. Thakur has a son and a daughter. Dr. Thakur has published two books: (1) *North-South Cooperation and Foreign Aid in Nepal*, and (2) *Money, Banking and Public Finance*.

Mr. Rudra Kumar Nepal

Born in Palpa in 1956, Mr. Rudra Kumar Nepal was educated at Tribhuvan University (Economics) and the Australian National University (Foreign Affairs and Trade). He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1983. During his diplomatic career, he served at Nepal's diplomatic missions in Calcutta (1986-90), Tokyo (1995-99), Washington D.C. (2003-2007), and Tel Aviv (2010) in different capacities. In the Ministry, he was assigned to various Divisions, including South Asia and SAARC, and headed the UN Division. Mr. Nepal was Nepal's Ambassador to Australia (2012-2016), with concurrent accreditations to New Zealand and Fiji.

Mr. Sundar Nath Bhattarai

Born on 24 May 1939 in Kathmandu, Mr. Sundar Nath Bhattarai is the founder President of AFCAN (2007-2011). He graduated from Trichandra College in Kathmandu and earned post graduate degree in Economics from Banaras Hindu University, India in 1960. He also holds Diploma in French Language, Alliance Française from Sorbonne University, Paris, France (1972). He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1961. During his long diplomatic career, Mr. Bhattarai served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Nepal's embassies in Myanmar (1965-66), France (1969-73), Japan (1978-81), and People's Republic of China (1982-86). In the Ministry, he undertook various assignments as Chief of Divisions of External Publicity, European Affairs, General Administration, United Nations and International Organizations, South-Asia and SAARC, and Acting Chief of Protocol. He was Chief Coordinator of the 3rd SAARC Summit held in Kathmandu in 1987. Mr. Bhattarai was Nepal's Ambassador to Thailand & ASEAN Countries and Permanent Representative to UNESCAP from 1991-96. He has authored books on various facets of Nepal-China relations. He has also contributed various articles on Nepal's relations with China, Japan, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, South-Asia and SAARC and Belt & Road Initiative, Xi Jinping Thought and Asian Civilization. Mr Bhattarai was awarded with foreign decorations from France, Japan, Laos, and "Special Book Award of China 2018", and various national decorations and awards. He is officiating Chairman & Founding Member of China Study Centre (CSC) Nepal established in 1999.

AFCAN: a Brief Introduction

The Association of Former Career Ambassadors of Nepal (AFCAN) was established in 2007. It is a non-profit making association, and is registered with the concerned authority of the Government of Nepal. Its objectives are, inter alia, to contribute to the promotion of Nepal's national interests in accordance with the country's foreign policy; conducting studies, researches, interactions and dialogues within the Association and with other bodies and providing independent institutional views and advice to the Government of Nepal on matters of foreign relations, which might be helpful in policy formulation and execution.

AFCAN has been working closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through occasional consultations on matters of importance on foreign relations. It has organised several workshops and seminars on important issues such as Foreign Direct Investment, External Trade, Foreign Employment, Tourism, Water Resources, etc. It also organizes occasional interactions with experts on matters of critical importance for the country.

Another highlight of AFCAN's activities is the "AFCAN Breakfast Roundtable", which is an interaction programme with foreign ambassadors accredited to Nepal, with newly appointed Nepali ambassadors preparing to take up their assignments in foreign countries, and with other experts of specific fields.