

# **AFCAN REVIEW**

**Volume 2, 2021**



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



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**(2021-2022)**

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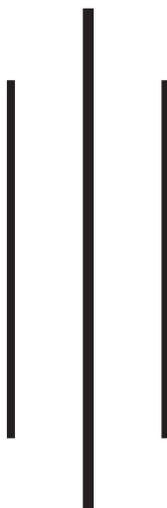
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## Foreword

It is a matter of pleasure and satisfaction for us to bring out "AFCAN REVIEW 2021", second volume, within the stipulated time for its valuable readers.

AFCAN, as a reservoir of knowledge and rich experiences in the foreign affairs and diplomatic domain, is dedicated to assisting in protection and promotion of foreign policy in the larger national interests. Therefore, in the fragile, unstable and complex regional and international situations where violence, conflicts, mistrust and great divide have been challenging the people and prosperity of the world, we are cautious to see that our contributors - academics, ambassadors and scholars/experts could breathe in new thoughts by way of analysis, reflection, appreciation and suggestions which may help in better understanding of the problems and finding their acceptable solutions. We may view that AFCAN REVIEW has started a modest effort in this direction.

We are confident that this publication comprising the articles written by the learned diplomats and scholars, and especially the written views of the Foreign Minister, Foreign Secretary, can add a new dimension to the strengthening and promotion of Nepal's foreign policy and its relations with the regional and global forums. Furthermore, we are sure that our humble effort in the publication of AFCAN REVIEW would somewhat contribute to generating better understanding of the need for peaceful coexistence among ourselves, upholding great human values in the rapidly changing geo-political spectrum.

We are grateful for the feedbacks and suggestions provided by the readers on our first volume that enabled us to improve this new volume. AFCAN is committed to discuss and address the bilateral, regional and international problems with priority that foremostly needs your precious suggestion and support.

We would also like to thank and appreciate the stupendous works and pains taken by the members of the editorial board for completing this publication with an additional value.

Last but not least, we wish to express our best wishes of Happy New Year 2022 to everybody.

**Dr. Rambhakta P. B. Thakur**

President

Association of Former Career Ambassadors of Nepal

December, 2021

## **Note by the Editorial Team**

The Association of the Former Career Ambassadors of Nepal (AFCAN), established in 2007, has been active in initiating deliberations on the core areas of foreign policy and diplomacy. It conducts programs on foreign policy issues, international relations and diplomacy, utilizing various tools such as discussion forums, publication, presentation and advocacy.

In order to provide a common platform to share views, observations and thoughts on national and international issues of common concerns, the AFCAN initiated to publish the AFCAN REVIEW as an annual compendium of articles, write-ups and observations from 2020 onwards. To give continuation to the publication, the AFCAN, therefore, have decided to come up with the second volume of the AFCAN REVIEW this year too.

As the Editorial team, we are privileged and honoured to compile this compendium in this format with valued contributions from diplomats and scholars on the issues related to Nepal's foreign policy and diplomacy as well as on other contemporary global, regional and bilateral issues of significance for Nepal. We would like to take this opportunity to convey our deep gratitude to our contributors for the time and energy they have given for this purpose, which has indeed helped us meet the deadline for publication of the AFCAN REVIEW, Vol. 2 (2021).

We have taken utmost care to present the write-ups as received from the authors with minimum alteration or change and have given attention to typography of the written contents. While we apologise for any shortcomings in the process, we wish to state that the Editorial Board or, for that matter, the AFCAN shall not be held responsible for any views, observations or data presented in the articles by the authors. Views, comments, data, etc. mentioned in the articles are the sole responsibility of the concerned authors.

We would appreciate it if you kindly send us your feedback, comments and observations on any aspects of the AFCAN REVIEW, including its coverage and content. Based on your feedback, we would put additional efforts to diversify the contents and improve the quality of the publication in the next issue.

**Deepak Dhital**

**Jhabindra Prasad Aryal**

**Ramesh Prasad Khanal**

December, 2021

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## Nepal - India Peace and Friendship Treaty, 1950 in the Present Context



- Bhagirath Basnet<sup>1</sup>

Time and again, political leaders and intelligentsia in Nepal are taking up the issue of Nepal-India Treaty of Peace and Friendship concluded in 1950. It is one of the most contentious issues in Nepal-India relation. We want to revise the treaty and India is also not opposed to doing so, but states that other agreements and treaties based on the 1950 Treaty should also be updated based on the revision. Nepal, however, remains unwilling to update other agreements and treaties.

The 1950 Treaty mostly entails security, social and economic factors in our relations which are the extension and expansion of the Treaty of Friendship of 1923. Prime Minister Chandra Shamsheer Rana had sought fresh negotiations for the replacement of the Treaty of the 1816 to establish fully and unequivocally the independence of Nepal and the Treaty of 1923 had formally recognized Nepal's independence. Later, both countries wanted to expand and continue those provisions.

Before signing the treaty in 1950, several factors had contributed to the signing of the Treaty. Nepal- UK relations were governed by the Treaty of Sugauli of 1816 and its successor- the Treaty of Friendship of 1923 along with age old conventions and practices. But after India received independence from the United Kingdom, both the countries seem to have felt for a new Treaty to continue with most of the things going on between the two countries in the new context that had brought changes in both Nepal and India.

Looking at the perspective then, many changes had taken place in both the countries and in the region which had prompted the 1950 Treaty. For example, India was partitioned into India and Pakistan. India had to request Nepal for troops to help contain Hindu-Muslim violence occasioned by the partition. Several battalions of the British Gurkhas had come under independent India. More importantly, the US was trying to fill the vacuum left in Nepal from the departure of UK from South Asia. The Chinese Liberation Army had entered Tibet. And pro-democracy protesters were threatening the oligarchic Rana regime in Nepal. On the face of it, both countries wanted to ensure continuity and certainty and commit to standing to external threats together. Besides, the Rana regime was also seeking reprieve from the pressure being mounted from the Indian soil by the Nepalese fighting for democracy and freedom.

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<sup>1</sup> Ambassador of Nepal to Bangladesh and Former Acting Foreign Secretary.

Nepal and India signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship on 31 July 1950. Inked by Nepal's Prime Minister Mohan Shamsher JB Rana and India's Ambassador to Nepal Chandreshwor Narayan Singh, the Treaty acknowledges and commits both sides to respects the complete sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of each other. It provides for the free movement of people and goods between the two countries and for maintaining close cooperation and collaboration on defense and foreign affairs. The Treaty has been widely criticized in Nepal as unequal, though it as such has no such provision to suggest that.

Article 1 of the Treaty commits both countries to acknowledge and respect the complete sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of each other. Under Article 2, both governments have to inform each other of any serious friction or misunderstanding with any neighboring country that may disrupt friendly relations between the two states. Article 3 provides for mutual diplomatic relations and representation. Both countries have pledged consular relations and privileges in Article 4.

Articles 5 grants Nepal freedom to import arms, ammunition, and warlike material and equipment, under mutually agreed arrangements.

Articles 6 and 7 deal with substantive economic and social arrangements between the two countries. Under Article 6, both countries have committed to give national treatment to each other's citizens in industrial and economic development and related concessions and contracts. Article 7 ensures that the nationals of both countries will have the same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership of property, participation in trade and commerce, movement and other prerogatives of a similar nature.

Article 8-10 relate to procedural matters. Article 8 cancels all previous treaties and agreements done between Nepal and British India. Article 9 makes the treaty effective on the date of signature and Article 10 provides that the treaty would remain in force until it is rescinded by either party by giving a year's notice.

As these provisions demonstrate, the treaty in letter is not unequal. Neither is it an albatross around Nepal's neck, because it can terminate the treaty by giving one year's notice. However, the following three factors turn an equal treaty in letter into an unequal agreement in spirit and enforcement.

First, the arrangements made for the implementation of Article 5. Nepal and India exchanged a letter in 1965 to implement Article 5 of the Treaty. The letter stipulates that India should supply all arms and ammunition needed by Nepal and should permit Nepal to procure them from the United States and the United Kingdom if it cannot supply them; and both countries should view attack on one as attack on the other as well. These stipulations are inconsistent with the sovereign prerogatives of Nepal. A sovereign country must be able to import weapons from whomever it wants without any other country's approval. But the 1965 letter ties Nepal's hand. Similarly, no

sovereign country can be obliged to treat aggression against one country as aggression against another as well unless both countries agree to do so under a military alliance. Nepal and India do not have a military alliance. The letter, therefore, puts Nepal under the Indian security umbrella.

Second, an equal treaty between unequal countries produces unequal and disproportional impact for the smaller country. Take the freedom of citizens of one country to reside in the other, for instance. If 1 percent of India's 1.3 billion population chooses to move to and settle in Nepal, Nepal's present population of 29 million will reach 43 million, a rise of nearly 50 percent. If Nepal's 1 percent population moves to India, India's population will increase by only 299,062, a rise of 0.02 percent. Similar differential impact applies to trade, commerce, and contracts in which the citizens of both countries are promised equal opportunity and privileges under the Treaty.

Third, the unequal power to enforce the provisions makes the treaty unequal in substance. If India breaches any provision of the 1950 Treaty, Nepal does not have the capacity to compel India to stick to it. In sharp contrast, India can impose the treaty provision on Nepal by using its diplomatic, economic, geographical and political pressure. It can even blockade the border or prevent Nepali goods transiting to and from the nearest Indian ports, as happened during the impasse of 1988-89. This differential power to enforce makes the treaty unequal for Nepal in substance.

### **Need for Revision**

As stated above, the 1950 Treaty is unequal in its arrangements, in spirit and in enforcement. Therefore, it should be revised. Besides, dramatic changes in national, regional and global contexts also make it imperative to amend the Treaty. Nepal has therefore proposed for amending the Treaty consistently after the restoration of multiparty democracy.

Furthermore, several contexts have changed enormously since the days the treaty was first signed. The Cold War has ended and globalization has taken hold. Most of the global political and economic barriers have considerably subsided, if not vanished altogether. Mobility of people across the world has increased. Although their strategic rivalry and conflicting territorial claims remain, China and India have put the war of 1962 behind, improved their relations, and become friendly economic and trading powers.

Nepal too has changed a lot since 1950. The Ranas who signed the 1950 Treaty are gone from the power scene. The Panchayat system has been removed and multiparty democracy has been reinstated in 1990. The monarchy too has been abolished in 2008. Nepal has been trying to pursue balanced relations with both India and China, the second largest economic and military power in the world.

In addition, neither Nepal nor India has implemented the 1950 Treaty in its letter and spirit. For instance, Nepal does not allow Indian citizens to buy land in the country or participate in local small business deals and contracts. India does not give the same treatment to the Nepali citizens as it does to Indians in jobs in the public sector or in other respects. It is therefore imperative for both countries to replace the outdated and irrelevant 1950 Treaty with one that reflects the reality of today.

The need for revising the Treaty is being increasingly acknowledged in India as well. Former Indian Foreign Secretary JN Dixit thinks that, though the Treaty has been beneficial to the people of Nepal, it has to be acknowledged that it vitiates Nepal's national identity and freedom of action. After fifty years of the signing of the agreement, he suggests, India should be sensitive to Nepal's demand and have no objection to renegotiating the Treaty. In mostly all prime ministerial visits, the joint communiqués have reiterated the need for treaty revision. Two countries have created a joint mechanism at the level of foreign secretaries. The foreign secretaries have had several consultations on this issue. Although reluctant, Indian officials are ready to revise or cancel the treaty by giving one year's notice, they are also quick to mention the caveat that all other treaties and agreements made on the foundation of the 1950 Treaty would also have to be revisited and revised.

### **Implications of Revision/Cancellation**

The 1950 Treaty is foundational accord on which so many other treaties, agreements and understandings have been signed subsequently. Its unilateral cancellation is an option but it may lead to unintended and undesirable consequences for Nepal and, to some extent, even for India. It is, therefore, infinitely more desirable to revise the treaty through consultation, understanding and agreement.

Unilateral cancellation of the Treaty will give Nepal greater independence in strategic and defense matters. It will also give a clean slate for the two countries to negotiate a new comprehensive treaty if both sides so desire. However, before a decision to annul the treaty is taken, a comprehensive study will have to be undertaken to identify, understand and assess the positive and negative consequences of such an action.

Actually, a study to assess the impact of scrapping the 1950 Treaty unilaterally has been done. It has been found that, if India dumps all the subsequent treaties and agreements based on the 1950 Treaty, Nepal and Nepalese would lose the preferential treatment in residence, trade, commerce, tariffs, education, health, etc.

The revision through mutual consultations will give room for negotiation, bargain, understanding and agreement along the way that would prevent unknown or unintended consequences and outcome. It is, therefore, infinitely more desirable to revise the Treaty through understanding and agreement than to cancel it unilaterally.

In this context, it would be pertinent to state here that the report prepared by the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) of Nepal and India has also agreed to replace the Nepal-India Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950 and regulate the Nepal- India border. But more than three years now the report has yet to be submitted. Giving due regard to the report prepared by the EPG will also address to some extent the issues of 1950 Treaty.

In other words, there is no doubt that the 1950 Treaty is outdated and needs revision. Both countries have flouted treaty provisions. The regional security situation has also changed. India and China both have become nuclear powers having mutually assured destructive deterrence. It would be a good idea to update the Treaty to current realities, remove the outdated provisions and include new provisions to address mutual concerns. Unilateral cancellation is an option but must be taken or discarded based on sound analysis rather than on raw sentiment.

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## Indian Ocean: “Ecology, Economy, Epidemic”



- Mr. Bharat Raj Paudyal'

As we grapple with the challenges of COVID-19, climate change and economic disruptions, I cannot overemphasize the theme: “Indian Ocean: Ecology, Economy, Epidemic”, which is equally relevant for coastal as well as landlocked countries. Gravity of these challenges demands our collective actions more urgently than ever. I am confident that the ideas we reflect on these two days will contribute towards this endeavour.

We all have been talking about interconnectedness. The problems today, transcending our borders, have accentuated the rationale of the dictum that we live in one world. Take for example the question of ecology. Though miles away, the existence of oceans and mountains is inseparably linked. The ecosystems depend on each other.

The Indian Ocean for long has been a source of nourishment and remained at the centre of hydrological cycles. The weather pattern in this ocean has direct bearing on the mountains, stretching across the Hindu-Kush Himalayas. The Himalayas instead feed the perennial rivers, serve as a heat sink in summer and sustain the civilizations downstream. The looming climate crisis has not spared either of them. The sea levels rise and ocean water gets more acidic on the one hand; and on the other, the high mountains are losing their snow covers. This is jeopardizing the lives and livelihoods of many. Marine as well as terrestrial biodiversity is fast deteriorating. Climate induced disasters have engulfed coastal states and small islands as well as the mountains. This intrinsic linkage should be well considered while pursuing the goal for healthy oceans –as embodied by UN SDG 14. For any meaningful agenda on the ocean must, therefore, take on board the land-locked countries and mountainous ones.

With its vast spread, the Indian Ocean is rich in resources. It provides important sea lanes that serve as arteries of the international economy. Routes for more than three fourth of the world’s sea-borne oil, and one third of the global trade, the Indian Ocean’s significance is doubly attested – in economic dimension as well as in its strategic value.

Even for landlocked countries like Nepal, the Indian Ocean is a lifeline for the majority of its external trade. Peace and stability in the Indian Ocean are, therefore, important for all of us. Issues such as piracy, marine terrorism, drugs trafficking and interruption

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*1 Excerpt of the Statement delivered by Mr. Bharat Raj Paudyal, Foreign Secretary and the Head of Nepali Delegation to the Fifth Indian Ocean Conference – IOC 2021, Abu Dhabi, UAE, on 5 December 2021. Mr. Paudyal was Ambassador of Nepal to Pakistan from 2012-2016.*

in freedom of navigation can erode economic vitality. Addressing these challenges should be an important pillar of the agenda to properly harness the potentials of the ‘blue economy’.

An enlightened approach for economic cooperation in the region can enhance intra-regional trade and investments. Such a move will have multiplier effects and make this region a substantial powerhouse of the world economy.

Landlocked developing countries are in need of international and regional support to enhance their capacity for reaping the benefits of the ocean, including in the utilization of the marine resources under the high seas. Realizing the already made commitments in an effective manner is crucial for enabling them in this regard.

Epidemics trigger a heavy toll not just on the economy but also on our lives as a whole. In the interconnected world, epidemics are seldom local in nature and can quickly spiral into a global pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has come as an epochal phenomenon. It has revealed that we may be facing the same tempest, but the countries are in different rafts. Some are better equipped to fend off the crisis, while the poorer one struggle to remain afloat.

With lives lost and livelihoods disrupted, the pandemic has further entrenched poverty, strained public health systems, and exacerbated inequality. Fallouts have been felt in international trade and tourism, the lifelines of many countries in the region. Besides, we are entering the third year of the pandemic with new variants of concern circulating from nowhere. With therapeutics innovation and capacity to produce vaccines, the Indian Ocean region has the potential to help save lives in the region and beyond. Impressive advancement of India and the UAE as pharmaceutical and technological hubs has hugely contributed to this end.

A more robust cooperation in vaccination will be a significant deliverable, proving the real prospect of our collective endeavour. Also, sharing of technical knowhow and capacity enhancement in healthcare should be at the forefront of regional cooperation in the context of the pandemic.

Nepal attaches great importance to the Indian ocean: its security, sustainability and economic potential. Linking our highlands with the Indian Ocean with seamless ‘hardware’ and ‘software’ of connectivity is our priority and these include roads, railways, waterways and power grid interconnection.

Nepal is committed to increasing the share of clean energy and achieving net-zero carbon emission by 2045, contributing to the region’s ecology. Nepal has vast potential in generating hydroelectricity to drive economic growth not only in the country but also in South Asia. Nepal stands ready to work with all countries in the Indian Ocean region to address the challenges pertaining to ecology, economy and epidemic.

*(Courtesy: [www.mofa.gov.np](http://www.mofa.gov.np))*

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## Human Rights Situation in Nepal: A Perspective



- Deepak Dhital<sup>1</sup>

Human rights are inalienable rights that every human person is entitled to enjoy by birth, irrespective of distinction of any kind including caste, creed, sex, religion, physical condition or nationality. These rights are meant for respect of the dignity and worth inherent in human persons so as to enable them to realize their full potentials. Development of human rights as a concept with deeper application in life began much earlier, but it came into prominent focus since the World War II. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted in 1948 set the first milestone in the universal values to be respected and fulfilled by all states and societies across the globe. The germinal ideas of human rights underpinning the UDHR articles are as relevant today as they were during the time of declaration, and many of the human rights problems seen in the globalized world can still be sorted out in its light. UDHR remains a fountainhead of modern human rights regime. It led to the formulation of various human rights conventions, including International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966).

In the evolution of global human rights regime, Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDPA, 1993) set some normative values to be universally respected and fulfilled. Important among them is the famous and often quoted line, ‘human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated.’ VDPA sets the scene that the international community must treat human rights in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis. It has also shed clear light on the interdependence and mutually-reinforcing nature of the triad of democracy, development and respect for human rights. Pursuing a single path in neglect of or less emphasis on the other two does not provide sustainability, nor lasting peace and security. This entails that civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and other human rights and fundamental freedoms must be taken in a holistic and integrated manner.

Another equally important reaffirmation made by VDPA is on the concept of the right to development in line with the 1986 UN General Assembly Declaration on the Right to Development. VDPA has unequivocally stated that Right to Development is a universal and inalienable right and an integral part of human rights. It has further clarified that

<sup>1</sup> Former PR/Ambassador to United Nations, other International Organizations and WTO in Geneva, Switzerland.

this particular right pertains to intra and inter-generational equity, participation and environmental sustainability. The Right to Development, however, has not received the attention it deserves by the world community, unlike other human rights of various generations. Since the establishment of an intergovernmental working Group in the Right to Development in 1998, work on finalization of a legally-binding instrument of this nature has not been completed yet. The process is still in the maze of negotiations between the North and South communities.

### **Ample Commitment**

Nepal's foreign policy objectives have progressively been aligned to international human rights regime, the rule of law and the principles and purposes of the United Nations system. These objectives are also conducive to regional cooperation and development in matters of mutual interests and concerns. The values of world peace, non-alignment and the five principles of the Panchsheel further steer our relations with all friendly countries, including our neighbors. The Constitution of Nepal, 2015 fully embodies these internationally recognized modern democratic values and principles.

The process of ratification of or accession to international human rights conventions and the various optional protocols associated with them got intensified after the restoration of democracy in 1990. As a result, Nepal has subscribed to seven of the nine core human rights conventions and six optional protocols so far. In 1998, Nepal acceded to the second optional protocol to International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Aiming At Abolition of Death Penalty and joined a select group of world's democratic countries to create a high moral ground for ultimate protection of human dignity and honour. Nepal is also a party to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, which constitute the core of the humanitarian conventions. It is also a party to Biological Weapons Convention, Chemical Weapons Convention and Geneva Gas Protocol. As far as ILO Conventions are concerned, Nepal has ratified seven of the eight ILO core Conventions. Article 34.3 of the Constitution has granted workers the right to form and join trade unions and engage in collective bargaining, essentially capturing the spirit of ILO Convention on Freedom of Association. This core convention remains to be ratified yet. Apart from this, we are also a state party to ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal People (1989), which is a unique convention with limited number of state parties. Among other conventions to which Nepal is a state party, Convention on Corruption, and the various Climate Change-related Conventions and Protocols can be mentioned as these international laws also pertain to protection and promotion of human rights and inclusive justice.

On the whole, Nepal falls in the category of countries with considerable commitment to human rights and related conventions. Domestication of these conventions through enabling legislations and putting in place appropriate mechanisms and procedure for their systematic implementation, monitoring and reporting are essential. Nepal

has adopted a number of legislations to operationalize the human rights framework enshrined in the constitution. Similarly, a number of legal provisions have been repealed or amended to bring them closer to human rights values. Pursuant to Article 47 of the Constitution, the Government of Nepal in 2018 enacted and/or made amendments to the existing laws to implement the fundamental rights conferred by the Constitution. Following is the list of 16 laws:

1. Act Relating to Land, 1964;
2. Public Security Act, 1990;
3. Environment Protection Act, 1997
4. Caste-Based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offence and Punishment) Act, 2011 ( first amendment, 2018);
5. Rights Relating to Disabled Persons, 2018;
6. Right to Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Act, 2018;
7. Consumers Protection Act, 2018;
8. Public Health Act, 2018;
9. Act Relating to Right to Housing, 2018;
10. Right to Food and Food Sovereignty Act, 2018;
11. Personal Privacy Act, 2018;
12. Act Relating to Free and Compulsory Education, 2018;
13. Act Relating to Employment, 2018;
14. Social Security Act, 2018;
15. Act relating to the Protection of the Victim of Crime, 2018;
16. Act Relating to Children, 2018.

The range of legal framework covers civil, political, economic, social, cultural and other rights and fundamental freedoms. Together with legislations such as National Penal Code. 2017 and National Civil Code, 2017, these Acts provide a sound basis for protection and promotion of human rights.

Human Rights Treaty Bodies with experts drawn from across the globe on a competitive basis through the UN system are engaged in periodic monitoring and review of the treaty implementation. Their concluding observations after following due process provide guidelines and insights for more effective implementation of the various provisions of the concerned treaty in the domestic context. National human rights institutions such as National Human Rights Commission and other sectoral and thematic human rights commissions also monitor the implementation and make timely recommendations to the Government for necessary reforms and improvement. Conventionally, International Law and Human Rights Division of the Office of the Prime

Minister bears the responsibility of overall coordination of domestic implementation of the human rights treaty. Other line Ministries coordinate and report on specific human right treaty falling under their jurisdiction. With three tiers of governments under the new federal system, adjustment in the governance system and vertical and horizontal coordination mechanisms are necessary for effective implementation and monitoring of international human rights treaty provisions.

### **Domestic Implementation Process**

Part-3 of the Constitution specifically and comprehensively deals with the international human rights normative framework to which Nepal is a party. Altogether 31 thematic and sectoral human rights issues are rolled-out in specific details from Article 16 to Article 46 of the Constitution. Under Article 18.1, equality before the law and equal protection of law for every citizen is guaranteed. There is also a guarantee that the State shall not discriminate, or apply any law that is discriminatory on the grounds of origin, religion, race, caste, tribe, sex, physical condition, condition of health, marital status, pregnancy, economic condition, language or region, ideology or the like (Articles 18.2 and 18.3). Clauses 18.3 and 18.4 provision equal pay for equal value of work and equal rights of sons and daughters to ancestral property without gender discrimination. Right to Social Justice (Article 42) ensures that all socially backward people, including women, Dalits, Adibasi /Janajatis, religious minorities, gender and sexual minorities, farmers, labourers, youths, etc., have right to participate in the structure of the State on the basis of proportion and inclusive principles. Clauses 42.2 and 42.3 under Article 42 keep special provisions directed to the indigent, endangered tribal people and people with disabilities. Apart from the thematic human rights issues, rights of women, Dalits, child as well as senior citizens have been treated under different Articles. Right to food, education, health, housing, clean environment, right to labour and employment have also been enshrined.

The Constitution seeks to ensure the enjoyment of inclusive human rights by all class and segments of the diverse Nepali population. To that end, for protection and promotion of the constitutionally-provisioned rights and monitoring of their implementation, the National Human Rights Commission has been working as a national watchdog. According to the constitutional provision, sector-specific commissions such as National Women's Commission, Indigenous Nationalities Commission, Madhesi Commission, Tharu Commission, Muslim Commission and National Inclusion Commission have also been operationalized now. The Constitution keeps a provision of reviewing the functions and appropriateness of these sectoral commissions after 10 years. This situation needs soul-searching with broader outlook into the integrated and universal nature of all human rights. Human rights obligations are more to do with protecting, respecting and fulfilling the commitment in a coordinated manner for which one powerful, effective and integrated human rights institution should be enough at the national level.

The Constitution enshrines the principle of special provisions to be made by law for the protection, empowerment and development of the disadvantaged and marginalized groups. A long list of potential beneficiaries from Dalits, Madhesis, Tharus, Muslims, endangered tribes, indigenous groups and indigent people are entitled to such benefits under ‘temporary special measures’.

The cardinal values of the Constitution are that it makes clear provisions for separation of power and accountability mechanisms among the executive, legislative and judiciary organs at the federal, provincial and local levels. The federal, state level and local (village/municipality) executives; the federal parliament, state assembly and local assembly as well as the supreme court, high court and district court exercise constitutionally defined and delineated responsibilities and exercise powers in their respective jurisdictions with provision of accountability. The independence, competence and impartiality of the Judiciary are ensured by institutionalized mechanisms of selection, posting, oversight, and accountability of judges, maintaining their professional dignity as well as effective administration of justice. At the local level, there is a provision of the Judicial Committee headed by the elected Deputy Chairperson of the rural municipality /municipality, which functions as a subordinate of the respective district court.

Access to and dispensation of justice in cases of human rights violations, therefore, should not be problem areas. However, deep-rooted structural impediments, governance shortfalls and constraint of resources, etc. are factors affecting the realization of this cherished goal.

### **Some Visible Achievements**

Political, social and economic empowerment of women, indigenous people, Dalits, Madeshis, Tharus, Muslims and those indigent people from marginalized areas have improved to some extent due to proportional inclusion principle in various tiers of local, provincial and national governance. The participation of women in the Federal Parliament has hit 34 percent, for example. Similarly, in the provincial assemblies and local level assembles, women’s participation has reached 34 % and 41% respectively. Women used to be mere 8 percent in the civil service prior to the introduction of reservation and quota system in the civil service in 2008, but their share in the civil service has risen to around 27 percent now, and it is on the rise every year. Other marginalized and disadvantaged groups have also had their share in political decision-making positions and in places of economic and social empowerment. This inclusive practice is inspirational and through diffusion of its impacts in society will expand its horizon.

According to the Election Commission’s published sources, the level of participation of Adibasi/Janajati, Dalits, Khas Arya, Madhesi, Muslim and Tharu in the Federal Parliament reached 23, 8, 46, 16, 3 and 5 respectively in percentage terms in the

last election held in 2017. These percentages do not conform to the allocated quotas, but the climate set for inclusive and participatory democracy is important for future course of action.

Nepal first introduced social security allowance in 1995 in the modest form targeting the senior citizens having crossed 75 years of age. Since then the scheme has undergone expansion over the period of time. In fiscal year 2019/20, more than 3.2 million people from marginalized and disadvantaged sections of the community were getting monthly allowances, and the number is on the rise. Accordingly, senior citizens over 70, Dalits and Karnali Province people having crossed 60 years, single and widowed women of any age group, endangered tribes, children of Karnali province, etc. are beneficiaries of this measure which has been one of the fundamental tools of social inclusion of the poorest of the poor and the most marginalized segments of the population. The distribution of social security allowances is now done through the local level governments.

The perception of looking at violence against women and girls (VAWG) has changed and the social stereotypes against women have improved. Gender equality is rising in health, education, employment and political participation and more women enjoy less discrimination and an increased empowerment outcome now. Other historically disadvantaged groups, including the differently-abled and different sexual orientations have also had their shares of equality of treatment and empowerment by some degree. But looking at the tremendous socio-cultural, geographical, regional, linguistic and ethnic diversity of Nepal, realizing human rights in an inclusive manner through constitutional, legal and temporary special measures is a formidable challenge. Question of meritocracy and competence are raised over proportional inclusion and participation. The problems of elite capture of the reservation and quota seats are also raised. Temporary special measures are, however, recognized by global community, and every nation and society has to find suitable and effective way to implement it in their own context. In heterogynous society marked by inequalities, addressing multiple and intersectional discrimination suffered by the bottom quintile calls for holistic and integrated approach. Deeper and integrated measures are therefore necessary to address the grassroots problems in human rights realization for all. Human rights education and awareness-creation at all levels assumes critical importance to develop and consolidate a culture of human rights.

Human rights outcomes of Nepal are getting visible now because of around three-decades of struggle to mainstream normative framework in fundamental rights and freedoms in all walks of life. The international community recognized this by electing Nepal to the Human Rights Council for two consecutive terms: 2018 – 2020 and 2021 - 2023.

## **A Blemish to be Addressed**

The initiative to protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all Nepalese would be more complete if the transitional justice process that was initiated after signing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2006 were brought to its logical conclusion. The CPA brought to a close the ten-year violent conflict and paved way for the peace process. Commitment made in the CPA and the Interim Constitution, 2007 in regard to transitional justice mechanism draws international attention. Any environment that tolerates impunity of serious human rights violation stifles or even nullifies the gains in human rights regime and hits back the national sustainable and inclusive development process. Time is overdue to fulfill this commitment. Now that the two Commissions – Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Commission on Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDEP) have been functional under a relevant Act enacted in 2014, these two bodies need to be provided with necessary mandate, resources and credible mechanism to work for final outcome. The outcomes must reveal the truth surrounding the ten-year conflict period; bring the perpetrators of serious human rights violation and grave violations of humanitarian laws to justice; ensure that any kind of blanket amnesty would not be given to the grave violator on either side of the conflict; make sure that the victims get adequate compensations and reparations and finally work out a modality to get full reconciliation in society to revamp the basis for lasting peace and justice. The 2014 Act in this regard shows more inclination towards accountability than amnesty as its approach goes past restorative justice. There are only some concerns to be addressed. A political will to complete it at the earliest is what is called for.

## **Conclusion**

The human rights regime of Nepal is vibrant and well-integrated into the constitutional and legal processes. A good normative framework for better human rights environment has been created through long and protracted political struggle. It is game of balance, equality, justice and equity, where everybody has a role to play. It is, however, the paramount role of the Government to protect, respect and fulfil the human rights commitments made by the state.

A conducive international environment of universal respect for human rights, the rule of law and equitable progress and prosperity is crucial for further improvement in rights situation everywhere. The guiding principles and norms and values must be observed in all situations. Improved enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms not only contributes to abiding peace, equality and justice in the society but also sets high moral ground for the country for more beneficial dialogue and cooperation with international community, including the immediate big neighbors.

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## Foreign Policy Formulation and Execution

- Gopal Thapa<sup>1</sup>



Formulation of foreign policy takes into consideration factors, among others, a country's geography, strategic location, economic development status and level of socio-cultural consciousness among people in the country. These elements together constitute what in fact are called the "vital national interests". The "Yam theory" propounded by the late king Prithvi Narayan Shah explains clearly what our vital national interests are and how Nepal should go about protecting them. Therefore, I believe the Yam theory still remains the most relevant and important policy guideline as far as Nepal's conduct of its international relations is concerned.

The Yam theory underlined the need for adoption of a cautious and balanced approach while pursuing its relations with its colossus neighbors, then British-India and Imperial China. Maintaining a studied but informed distance from both was what the Yam theory all about. Nepal was, therefore, able to protect its national independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty during the time when the entire south-Asian region had fallen victim to fast spreading clutches of imperialism and colonialism.

### Diversification of international relations

It was only after the 1950 onwards when Nepal finally came out of the cocoon of the Rana dynastic rule that it began to diversify its international relations.

If King Prithvi Narayan propounded the Yam theory, it was late King Mahendra, Tanka Prasad Acharya and BP Koirala who made important contributions in various times to the diversify Nepal's foreign relations by expanding diplomatic relations with countries from Europe, Africa and Asia. Nepal embraced the major foreign policy underpinnings of universal character, such as abiding faith in the principles and purposes of the UN Charter, Non-alignment, five principles of peaceful co-existence, among others that still remain the cornerstone for her international relations management, as they constitute the time-suited and enduring theoretical basis for our foreign policy.

### Policy and practice

It is a fact that policies alone, regardless of soundness, cannot produce the desired results. They bear results, only when executed through application of smart and effective diplomacy. In other words, it is their effective execution with exercise of smart and result-driven diplomacy that is more important. In Nepal, particularly the

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<sup>1</sup> Former Chief of Protocol at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

post-90s Nepal, I don't recall having heard, let alone witness, any informed debates on the methods and manner with which foreign policy objectives should be implemented to better respond to the contemporary national and international needs. Democratic governments should have given enough time, space and thoughts in terms of rendering the conduct of foreign policy in keeping with the changed international order. Barring a few closed door interactions with selected people, no meaningful and wide ranging public debates and discussions have ever taken place at the initiative of the Foreign Ministry. It would have been a good idea to have organized such comprehensive debates and interactions from time to time to gain a better insight into and correct perspectives on, the appropriate diplomatic tools to be devised. The refined and fine-tuned conclusions and recommendations emerged from such debates would have certainly helped the Government to seek national consensus on core foreign policy issues among political parties.

### **Never a subject of public debate**

No government of the day did ever pursue that path to achieve at least minimum national consensus on core foreign policy issues, before making them the integral part of our Constitution. The ideal way would have been that the distilled policy elements reached through broad-based participatory processes, including their execution, should have then been enshrined in the Constitution and pursued with a fair degree of consistency, credibility and clarity, irrespective of changes in governments as guiding principles in the pursuit of foreign policy. Minor shift in emphasis on implementation may happen with a change in governments. Yet, the fundamental goals and principles of foreign policy remain unaltered.

I was only presenting an ideal way of formulating, as well as effective execution of foreign policy. But, in Nepal, foreign policy formulation exercise has never been a subject of serious public debate! It was understandable that foreign policy issues during the Panchayat days enjoyed an aura of exclusivity. However, the post-90 periods and the periods after the popular movement, the clamor for a foreign policy that is pro-people and result-driven grew exponentially because of increased public awareness of and understanding about foreign policy issues. It was hoped the new Nepal under Democratic Federal Republic setup will initiate interactive dialogues with participation of actors as wide-ranging as intellectuals, scholars, foreign policy experts, former diplomats, business sectors representatives and others, to render foreign policy more inclusive and people oriented. But such a need was never felt, let alone hold discussions. Nor were attempts ever made to achieve national consensus on core foreign policy issues. Surprisingly, even during writing of the Constitution by the CA, foreign policy issues could not figure prominently and visibly for public debate. In other words, such a vital issue remained agonizingly ignored! The Constitution thus failed to articulate a clear and comprehensive picture of our Foreign

policy goals and objectives distilled from informed public debates, including ways for its implementation through exercise of effective diplomacy. In a way, popular expectations for a pro-people, inclusive and development-friendly foreign policy formulation and execution couldn't find a clear resonance in the Constitution.

### **National consensus never reached**

Even after the new Constitution was promulgated, no governments made serious and genuine efforts to achieving national consensus on core foreign policy issues in the conduct of foreign policy. Reports with the objective of undertaking time-suited organizational reforms were prepared from time to time, with emphasis on the need for achieving and conducting national consensus foreign policy. But no governments have since made serious and sincere efforts to that end. On the other hand, the governments chose to make a selective application of only some of the recommendations from the reports that served their personal interest. On the strength of the recommendations of such reports, new embassies abroad were open without conducting adequate cost-benefit analyses, only to appoint as envoys to their entirely diplomatic greenhorn loyal followers. It was sad every new government that came in, spoke highly of the need to forge national consensus on the conduct of foreign policy, but never pursued it with the seriousness it deserved. Lack of national consensus on core foreign policy issues, therefore, is the main reason why we have been seeing so many inconsistencies and anomalies in the conduct of foreign policy. It would not be unfair to say that the foreign policy of Nepal now is being operated at the whims and pleasure of the governments in power. Elements of continuity, consistency and clarity have all been thrown into winds. Downplaying of diplomacy in the running of foreign affairs, breaching of diplomatic code of conducts in meeting with foreigners and making sensitive diplomatic appointments without heeding to the advice of the Foreign Ministry has become the name of the game!

### **Operational dynamism**

Let me now touch upon some aspects of operational dynamism. People and policies are important underpinnings of any organization, including Foreign Ministry. We can also call these three elements- institution, individuals and ideas as the integral part in the conduct of foreign policy. Policies constitute important institutional frameworks because they contain organization's visions. It is important, therefore, that foreign policies are sound, realistic, time-suited and reflective of the ideals and objectives that the Ministry as an Organization stands for.

The foreign ministry officials or individuals together help create ideas and organizational visions in terms of how to conduct foreign policy effectively. Diplomacy is the main tools or methods with which the policy visions are translated into action. Together, they generate an ideal ambience for organization's operational dynamism. Hence,

effective conduct of foreign policy demands the application of informed, skilled and effective diplomacy.

The principle and goals articulated in our constitution are reflective of the geo-political and socio-economic ground realities. However, policies alone are not, and cannot be, the measure of organizational soundness and success. These days one gets to read and hear a lot about operational dynamism of an organization. Opinions and views vary as to what actually operational dynamism is all about. Many believe it refers mainly to the favorable in-house working environment, manned by highly skilled, motivated and professional officials. In Foreign Ministry, these officials are called career diplomats who are groomed and trained for years in the art and knowledge of diplomacy. They are also considered as linchpin for the pursuit of a country's foreign policy through application of effective diplomacy. Operational dynamism of foreign policy depends on their ability to interpret and analyze the delicate nuances of diplomacy for the promotion and protection of country's vital national interest, in keeping with the foreign policy goals and objectives. So what is the quality and standard of our Foreign Ministry's operational dynamism in terms of discharging its diplomatic functions effectively? How well trained, professional, knowledgeable and articulate are our career diplomats for that?

### **Quality vs quantity**

Foreign Ministry's quantitative strength has vastly expanded in the last few years. Many new positions have been created in the ministry and its missions abroad. But more questions are raised when quality of delivery is concerned. One of the constant criticisms against the ministry pertains to its less-than satisfactory diplomatic performance, both at the Ministry and in the diplomatic missions abroad. Career, or non-career, it is alleged that foreign ministry officials and its diplomats have failed to give a good diplomatic account of themselves either at the bilateral or in the multilateral missions. Many believe Nepal has lost its visibility that it once had at the bilateral and multilateral arenas. In multilateral forums, loss of elections both for United Nations Security Council's non-permanent seat and later on for the United Nations General Assembly President that we had contested are the examples that are often cited.

vSharp and progressive erosion in the practice of effective diplomacy, therefore, has always remained a moot topic in the post-republic governments. Depleting institutional strength because of frequent political interference, Foreign Ministry being led by a leadership bereft of knowledge about the sensitivities involved in the foreign policy matters and lack of focus on, competence, quality and professionalism are some of the reasons cited. It is not that successive governments of the time did not make efforts. They pledged to work for making foreign policy, including its practice, more attuned to the emerging needs of the post-republic Nepal. But these commitments remained only on papers and remain largely unimplemented.

This was because, earlier on, all governments suffered from the protracted political instability, bane of coalition governments, politicization of bureaucracy and absence of clear-cut organizational goals. Foreign Ministry, too, could not remain immune to this messy environment. Professional competence of its personnel suffered heavily. Competent officials, for lack of incentives, became opportunity-seekers, often knocking at the politicians' doors seeking favor. Thus post-republic governments miserably failed to give the attention and importance to the vital foreign policy issues. Foreign Ministers were picked at the whim and pleasure of the Prime Minister, who lacked sufficient knowledge and experience on foreign policy matters. Inability of our political leadership to make a distinction between domestic and foreign policy issues and sensitivities caused sharp decline in the country's diplomatic image abroad.

Disappointingly, even when the politically stable government came in, it did not show any serious interest to make positive changes in matters of foreign policy execution. Rather, it continued to suffer from the same undiplomatic malaises cited above. It made irrational and undiplomatic statements if it served its personal interests, only to create controversies. Acting against established diplomatic code of conduct, breaching diplomatic norms and standards as often as it wished, despite knowing the enormity of damage that may inflict upon the time-honored diplomatic decorum and decency by such undiplomatic behavior remained a routine affair. The government seemed little bothered that such behavioral inconsistencies would create serious credibility questions in the eyes of our international and bilateral friends, that it would cost heavily on our international image and that our diplomats and negotiators, as a result, tend to lose negotiating edge in the vital national agendas and issues as they are not trusted. Like in India and in many other South Asian countries, conduct of foreign policy in Nepal too, should have largely been left to the Foreign Ministry. Promotion of operational dynamism in the ministry's workforce would call for encouraging and injecting a fair degree of professionalism into the entire spectrum of Foreign Ministry. This would mean appointing a thoroughly professional diplomat with long diplomatic experience and exposure as Foreign Minister. The same should be the measure for appointment of ambassadors as well.

We can take a leaf from the diplomatic book from India where former foreign secretary has now been on the chair of Minister for External Affairs. Practice of appointing foreign minister from among professional diplomats is the first step which must be introduced sooner than later. However, this alone will not suffice. The entire Foreign Ministry workforce needs to be redeemed from unprofessional intervention from any quarters. The foreign minister should be given full operational freedom to institute required reforms in the ministry to render its workforce more professional, result-driven and capable of dealing with the challenges in foreign affairs.

Their diplomatic performance must be measured in terms of the quality of service they have delivered. The present business as usual attitude will backfire. Hence, we have to make sweeping reforms in the way we have been conducting foreign policy. Ongoing and emerging geo-political and socio-economic challenges and their ramifications on our national security interests require diplomats with sharp analytical knowledge on international relations. They need to have enough diplomatic skill to be able to negotiate our way out of those challenges. This is possible only when we sufficiently enhance our negotiating skill and leverage our diplomatic prowess. To achieve this we must place greater focus on improving the operational dynamism of foreign policy in the days ahead.

### **Political interference**

The progressive decline in the operational aspect of our foreign policy has become the serious issue of concern in the media, well-meaning intellectuals, conscientious politicians and seasoned former diplomats. Among others, blatant political interference into sensitive diplomatic functions have been cited as the fundamental reasons. Consequently, the Foreign Ministry and its manpower have become the unfortunate victims of politicization. It has sadly been reduced to a mere tool to be used at the discretion of the government and powerful political masters. Clearly, this has had a deleterious effect on our diplomats' performance abroad. We have plenty of examples of the inability of our ambassadors abroad to disseminate timely and adequate information to the international community in preempting in time any disinformation campaign about Nepal. Unfortunately, all the governments in the past remained impervious to all the calls and clamors for ending this political interference. As a result, political connection, personal relations, nepotism and favoritism have become the standard government norms, particularly, for selecting political nominees as ambassadors, utterly overlooking professionalism, academic background and diplomatic skill and will of a candidate. The Foreign Ministry has been seemingly made a silent sideline onlooker. It has not been allowed to play even the recommendatory role that it deserved, in this process. All governments that came in gave verbal assurances only. At the end of the day, they also have chosen to follow on the same soiled footsteps of their predecessors, particularly in respect of envoy appointment. These appointments, this time round also have been shared among key political parties in power, under the same infamous "political quota system"! More disappointingly, such political nominees have literally swamped those from the Foreign Ministry!

Undoubtedly, political appointments in ambassadors are made everywhere from the business community, academics and experts on international relations. This is basically to harness talents from outside and utilize their knowledge, expertise and skills into diplomatic arenas for better diplomatic outputs. There is nothing wrong in political appointments as long as the candidates are picked on the basis of their sound

academic background, competence and professionalism. In fact, such appointments bring- in fresh and innovative ideas and may inject diplomatic dynamism in the work. Unfortunately, in Nepal, power of purse, political and personal connection, and trusted party loyal continue be considered for political nominations as ambassadors! Many independent observers regard such political appointments as an opportunity without accountability and responsibility. It is assumed to be an expensive pleasure trips abroad for those fortunate political nominees, at the colossal cost of scant national coffer! Such a sordid public perception has well-founded reasons. The growing loss of our diplomatic image and prestige abroad and the sharp and progressive erosion in ability, credibility and deliverability of our diplomats has a lot to do with the appointment of such unprofessional and uncouth, as ambassadors. Regrettably, the government has knowingly refused to learn lessons from the continued loss of diplomatic image of the country by less than diplomatic performances of such callow and shallow political ambassadors!

In picking political appointees as envoys, therefore, important qualities such as competence, skills, appropriate educational background and professionalism have to be given due consideration. It is imperative that political appointments for as sensitive and professional post as ambassador must not be driven purely by political, personal and party interests.

It is also true all nominees from the Foreign Service may not look necessarily impressive. Presumably, they all may not be equally gifted with necessary diplomatic skills, knowledge and competence as required for the job! It must be understood that appointment as ambassador is not a cake walk! It is as much an opportunity as it is a challenge to be able to earn, through demonstration of performance the qualification of a real "career diplomat"! I believe foreign ministry officials are simply "career foreign service officers" before they go out to serve as ambassadors. At the most, their various diplomatic assignments in the past can be understood as only the practical learning and experience -gaining processes in the field of diplomacy. In a way, these were not the diplomatic leadership roles such as the Ambassador. Only from the time that they become ambassador will they enter into the real but complex domain of diplomacy! This is because ambassadors' role and functions are not merely about making diplomatic representation abroad. They have to be equally effective communicators and adept negotiators to promote and protect their country's national interests abroad. In this new role, they confront with new international actors, come across new agenda items and confront new working methods. Adequate training, diligent preparation, enough international exposure and sufficient "diplomatic skill and will" are necessary to achieve success. Clearly, those officers who have seriously had taken their earlier mission assignments as occasions to remain frequently engaged in diplomatic interactions, negotiation and to learn network building skills will perhaps be more at ease in handling the new and varied diplomatic leadership roles. Only their

proven diplomatic dexterity and ability to navigate their way through these complex diplomatic responsibilities would qualify them to be called as real "career diplomats". Moreover, marked elements of individuality, powerful personality, experience, seniority and above all, impeccable performance track -record are supposed to be the hall marks of a seasoned and successful diplomat, career or non-career. In view of the lack of enough information outside the Ministry about the professional antecedents of the aspirant ambassadors, questions remain whether all the nominees from the foreign service do really embody, more or less, those hallmarks; whether they are experienced enough to successfully deal with the diplomatic challenges that may be thrown upon them; and whether the Foreign Ministry has prepared them sufficiently for the new diplomatic role and responsibility. Diffusion of information about their professional antecedents through regular exercise in public diplomacy by the Foreign Ministry would have helped defuse such a public misperception. This is because, informed publics, politicians and intellectuals of the country have always pinned their high hopes on them, in view of the dwindling diplomatic image of our diplomats, largely those of the political ones, abroad.

Since these erratic behaviors of the stable government of the time have already caused considerable damage to the country's image, hopefully the present coalition government would avoid trying to step into the diplomatic shoes of its predecessor.

## **Conclusion**

It may sound ridiculous to many to talk of a dynamic Foreign Ministry with sharp operational teeth at the present murky political ambience. We all know the country is at a crossroads of confusion. Today, all the three important organs – Executive, Legislative and Judiciary have shown confusion about separation of power. A rainbow coalition government with divergent personal and political interests is in place. These coalition partners may not allow any institutional reforms that may contradict with their interest to get off the ground. The dismal scenario in the conduct of foreign policy at present is also very much the reflective of the current messy domestic politics. It would therefore be pointless to talk of reform in the foreign policy domain alone. In such an uneasy national ambience, one can only hope that the coalition government may not damage further the credibility and image of Nepal in the international community. Maintaining a balanced approach to our bilateral and multilateral relations with a fair degree of fairness, caution and calculation is important, therefore. It is encouraging the coalition government has so far not been out of sync with handling foreign policy matters. It must understand it can falter only at its own and that of the country's peril.

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## Stepping into the Next Level: Nepal's Graduation from LDC Group and Diplomatic Efforts



- Gyan Chandra Acharya<sup>1</sup>

The United Nations General Assembly endorsed the decision of ECOSOC to graduate Nepal from the LDC status with a 5-year transition period in November this year. This is a recognition of sustained progress that Nepal has achieved over the years, in particular in the last decade, in human development indicators as well as in the economic and some other defined vulnerability indicators specific to the LDCs. Even though Nepal is yet to make progress to meet the gross national income criterion, our efforts in the next five years should be geared towards making the transition process smooth, irreversible, transformative and sustainable. This requires continued progress in human development and building resilience, while ensuring economic transformation in the country. This would increase general income and ensure a rapid, inclusive and sustained economic progress in the days ahead. This is where we need to focus our strategy on with clear actions on the ground in a more coordinated and effective manner.

While working towards achieving these objectives, we should also make synergistic efforts to accelerate progress in achieving SDGs, which have largely incorporated many of the LDC agenda. Now that we face an unprecedented, sweeping and comprehensive impacts of Covid-19 affecting not only the lives of the people but also their livelihoods, overall economic activities and social stability, strengthening resilience from such a pandemic and building recovery have to be part of the overarching feature of our national graduation strategy. Achieving our own national development objectives, meeting SDGs, coping with pandemics and climate change impacts and meaningful graduation all necessitates us to take a coherent approach that keeps the people at the center, makes them more capable and productive and builds an inclusive and resilient economy with structural transformation. Thus, it requires a close collaboration with and support from the neighboring countries and all the other international development partners.

Graduation of Nepal from the LDC status should be looked at from both the opportunities it provides and the challenges it throws in. LDCs have always articulated well before the international community that the development challenges

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<sup>1</sup> Former Foreign Secretary (2007-2009), Nepal's Ambassador to the UN and WTO in Geneva (2003-2007), Ambassador to the UN, New York (2009-2012)

of these countries, in particular, their structural impediments require a strong national ownership and leadership within the country and equally strong and favorable international environment with targeted and specific supports of the development partners. International support for these countries is an investment in global peace and sustainable prosperity.

Graduation as a common goal of the international community was well recognized during the Fourth LDC conference held in Istanbul, Turkey. LDCs and their development partners jointly agreed to pursue this objective with a separate chapter on graduation and smooth transition in the final declaration. In order to ensure a smooth transition without disruptions to their development prospects, it was stressed that development and trade partners and UN and other international institutions have a vital role to play and extend support in a way that the phasing out of benefits and measures remain consistent with their specific development situations and their expectations of structural transformation.

The spirit of mutual accountability has always guided the nature and scope of international cooperation in favour of the most vulnerable groups of countries. In particular, the excruciating burden of the inhuman poverty, a low level of human and economic development with a high degree of vulnerabilities characterized by low domestic savings and a huge need for investment to build necessary infrastructure accompanied by technical and institutional constraints have further exacerbated the relative position of these countries vis-a-vis other developing or advanced countries in term of reaping due benefits from international trade and investment opportunities. While some perceptible progress have been made in terms of their integration into the global economy which has gradually increased their absolute volume of international trade and inward foreign direct investment in the last two decades, they are nowhere near their need, capacity or expectations. Therefore, during the transition time and beyond, Nepal needs to work closely with the international partners to ensure that the support measures especially in regard to the allocation of ODA in concessional terms commensurate with its capacity would be enhanced to effectively propel its progress to the next level in a more accelerated and sustainable manner. Now external development finance is needed more not only in the social sector to keep the momentum, but also in infrastructure and productive economic sectors to sustain progress towards graduation with a transformative change. Similarly, duty- free and quota-free access of our products to the markets of developed countries and also to more capable developing countries should be enhanced during the transition, and a similar supportive market access mechanism should be ensured to the Nepalese products in the post-graduation period to avoid any disruption. These two support measures with policy flexibilities in some of the core areas of economic activities including trade and IP policies will play a pivotal role not only in preventing any possible rollback in their achievements, but also in moving them forward in a more confident manner. In fact, the situation of

LDCs the day after the graduation does not essentially change that much. It is more an attainment of an important milestone with a higher level of confidence and some better signs of the economy and human development. Therefore, they should not be left alone in the whirlpool of cut-throat global competition without adequate support measures.

There are also some new opportunities that would be opened up with graduation. The international credit rating would improve, which will help gain better access to international finance from the global market. It would also exhibit a sign of confidence among the people that their country is no longer at the bottom of the global rung, but moving forward to the next level of development. This also opens up better opportunities for attracting foreign direct investment in the country. Of course, there is a big difference between attracting foreign investment and the actual transfer and retention of FDI, which requires an equally robust and facilitatory foreign investment policy with an effective and coordinated implementation mechanism in the country.

The graduation prospect also provides us with an opportunity to initiate and deepen reforms and policy initiatives in many areas, especially in changing the structure of the economy away from consumption and import towards more productive capacity development, human capital development and resilience. Similarly, by introducing and consolidating policies to increase competitiveness, to enhance supply side capacity together with better trade-related infrastructure and logistics, to participate in regional value chains and to enjoy better market access, we can inject new impetus to uplift our export performance from a dismal level at present.

Therefore, taking this opportunity of graduation, Nepal should develop a coherent transition and graduation strategy with special focus on key transformative sectors that can drive the economy, people and the country to a new era of ever more accelerated and inclusive progress and prosperity. This is possible only if we summon our collective will and work together with all the stakeholders especially the private sector and sub national governments in a more coordinated and effective manner.

Many countries in our region are graduating from the LDC status in the next few years. It is very likely that all LDCs from the Asia-Pacific region would graduate out of the LDC status in the next one decade and a half. In our own South Asia region, Maldives has already graduated, and Bhutan is graduating in 2023. Nepal, Bangladesh and Laos are graduating by November 2026. Cambodia, Myanmar and East Timor are also following. Therefore, it is also important for us to look around our neighborhood and make sure that we are not left behind and our graduation process is followed with determination and commitment to transform our economy and the lives of the people in a responsible manner.

In order to make the transition smooth and transformative, we have to make sure that there is a strong political ownership of the entire process. The transition requires a clear strategy, a coordinated response and some important policy reforms. That means the political and administrative leaderships have to be focused on the issues, understand the implications, prepare an effective plan of action and establish credible all-inclusive institutional arrangements to steer the process for the next few years. A high-level committee should be constituted to provide an overall coordination, preferably under the Prime Minister with participation of the relevant Ministers. Similarly, the Steering Committee under the Vice Chair of NPC should be made further effective. And a dedicated Action Committee with multistakeholder participation should be also formed to consistently pursue the issues at the level of implementation with better monitoring and follow up in a time-bound manner.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should take a prominent role in all the three levels of institutional arrangements. It should prepare a strong diplomatic advocacy strategy for the next five years for transition and thereafter for post-graduation. It should mobilize its missions in all the capitals of our important development and trade partners. It should minutely analyze the situation on the ground from our national perspective and pursue our strategy in particular on development cooperation, trade, investment and technology. They should also closely follow how other graduating countries are pursuing their interests. And the issues of collective interests should be taken up jointly, and the issues that are of individual national interests should be taken up with our own approach and initiatives. Priority should be given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ensuring regular interactions with the NPC, and core Ministries like Finance and Commerce, Industry and Supplies so that we have a strong home-front coordination. Similarly, the embassies should be asked to report quarterly in detail about the progress and the efforts they have made in order to keep all the relevant offices or institutions in the loop. The foreign diplomatic missions here should also be briefed quarterly or semi-annually to inform them about our work and ensure that they also report back to their home countries the developments taking place here in regard to our transition related measures.

As we prepare a stronger foundation for a restructured economy and for a confident nation with a transformative vision of transition and graduation from the LDC status, this is a right time to employ all our diplomatic skills, enhance our international advocacy with a clear strategy and also effectively coordinate the home front and the external front. This opportunity should not be missed for lack of initiatives, commitment, strategy or resources.

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## Evolution of Nepal's Foreign Relations - post 1950 A Narrative With Some Personal Recollections



- Kedar Bhakta Shrestha<sup>1</sup>

I will deal with the subject beginning from the advent of democracy in the country after the fall of the Rana rule. After a brief tour d'horizon from the early 1950s onwards up to about 1965, I propose to deal with the period from 1964 onwards up to 2006 as I was in the government service during that period in various capacities except for nearly two years ( 2002-2004). After 2006, being not any more with the government, I will venture to make some observations as an outsider only.

### A Brief historical overview of the 1950s and 1960s

Nepal had remained totally isolated from the outside world during the Rana rule which ended in early 1951. Prior to this period, Nepal's external dealings remained limited to China ( Tibet for all practical purposes), British India and Great Britain. However, even before the collapse of the Rana regime, Nepal had entered with diplomatic relations with India ( after the departure of the British), the United States and France. Nepal's establishment of diplomatic relations with China in 1955 was prompted by its desire to expand the horizons of its diplomatic activities. Nepal's admission to the United Nations on 14 December 1955 opened up new avenues for its diplomatic engagements.

From the year mid-1950s onwards, diplomatic relations were further extended with countries like the then Soviet Union, Japan, Pakistan, Australia, Thailand, both Germanys and Koreas and so on. The establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel in 1960 was a bold diplomatic move by Nepal at a time when Israel was shunned by most of the non-western countries of the world. The United States opened its embassy in 1959. Nepal had opened its embassy in Washington D.C a year earlier in 1958.

The visit of PM B.P. Koirala to Israel in June 1960, soon after establishment of diplomatic relations, was a bold and visionary move on Nepal's part. Also, his visit to China the same year can be seen as Nepal's increasing desire to expand its contact with the outside world. King Mahendra's visit to the United Kingdom in 1960, Premier Chou-en-Lai's visit to Nepal in 1960, Queen Elizabeth's visit to Nepal in 1961 and King Mahendra's visit to China were examples of Nepal's growing exposure to and involvement with the outside world beyond India.

<sup>1</sup> Former Foreign Secretary and Ambassador to Belgium (1997-2002) and the United States of America (2004-2006).

There was a time in early 1960s when it's ambassador based in New Delhi used to have concurrent accreditation to countries as far away as Lebanon and Japan. This was due to our man power and financial limitations. Up until 1947, Nepal had only one embassy in London and consulates in Calcutta and Lhasa. However, in its its quest for further expansion of diplomatic reach, Nepal established its residential embassies in Moscow and Beijing in 1961 and in Bonn and Tokyo in 1965. In 1967, Nepal added Paris in its list of diplomatic missions abroad.

### **Nepal's quest for greater outside relations**

Just before India gained independence, an Asian Relations Conference was hosted by the provisional Prime Minister of India , Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru in March-April 1947. Nepal participated in this conference with a high level delegation led by Gen Bijaya Shumshere JB Rana ( son of the last Rana Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher and father of Pashupati Rana).

In the aftermath of the fall of the Rana regime, Nepal's major exposure to international event was its participation at the Bandung Conference of 1955. It was in this conference that 29 countries of Asia and Africa, with the likes of Nasser, Nehru and Soekarno, came together to assert their own voice in international affairs. It was here in Bandung that the seeds of the Non-aligned movement were sown.

Establishment of diplomatic relations with China in 1955, and subsequent visit to China by Prime Minister Tanka Prasad Acharya can be seen as Nepal's desire to expand its diplomatic horizon and reach. King Mahendra's participation in the First Non-aligned Summit in Belgrade in 1961 gave Nepal a broad rostrum to voice its views as one of the founder members of the NAM. In the subsequent years and summits, Nepal has actively participated in all the summits and lesser conferences to date. However, after the fall of the Soviet Union and more notably in the recent years and in the scenario of a multi- polar world, the role and relevance of the movement is being increasingly questioned. Notwithstanding that, Nepal has played a significant role within the movement by strictly upholding its principles as well as raising its voice for the cause of the least developed and land locked countries.

### **Nepal's early years in the United Nations - 1955 to 1970**

But for the power play of the super powers, Nepal should have become a member of the UN even earlier than when it got admission. Eventually, as a package deal, Nepal along with 15 other countries were admitted to the United Nations on 14 December 1955. The membership of the UN opened up for Nepal a chance to have its voice heard around the world. Ambassador Rishikesh Shah brilliantly represented Nepal in the forum. His performance in the UN as Permanent Representative (1956-60) won him many laurels and he was being talked about as a future Secretary General. But that did not happen as Burma's U Thant got the post instead. However, in recognition

of his talents, Rishikesh Shah was appointed as Chairman of the UN Investigation Commission on the death of then Secretary General Dag Hammarsjold in a plane crash in Lusaka in 1961.

In the sixties, decolonization and apartheid were among the main concerns of the United Nations and Nepal actively participated in the deliberations on these issues and were also elected to many related committees. Nepal's participation in the UN Peacekeeping Missions which started in a small manner in 1958 with UNMOGIL (Lebanon) and later with UNMOGIP (Kashmir) has now expanded greatly and one of the success stories of Nepal's involvement with the United Nations.

Nepal's active involvement in the UN during the late fifties and sixties was rewarded with it being elected as a non-permanent member of the United Nations for the two year period of 1969-70. It was a recognition of Nepal's role and active involvement in UN activities since becoming its member in 1955.

### **Assessment of the period 1951-1970**

It would seem from the above account that during this period Nepal sought to expand its external relations as much as possible within its limited human and financial resources. While reflecting on the actions and events at that time, one has to bear in mind Nepal's limited knowledge of and exposure to the outside world. The earlier contacts with the British and after 1947 with India, did not adequately educate and prepare Nepalese diplomats to engage with the wider world.

While the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship was signed by the last Rana Prime Minister in a desperate attempt to save the Rana rule, later agreements with India also showed lack of diplomatic maturity. The Koshi and Gandak Agreements were made without proper understanding of their implications and possible adverse effects on Nepal. Nepal simply didn't or couldn't do proper homework before signing the agreements which even today continue to remain controversial as being harmful to Nepal's interests.

However, it must be said in all fairness that Nepal continued to enhance its diplomatic capabilities by inducting young university graduates in the foreign ministry starting from 1960 and a separate Public Service Commission examination for entry level officials. But there was still a lack of proper and effective negotiating and communicating skill.

Be it in the forums of Non-alignment, the UN or the Group of 77, Nepal remained active and espoused the cause of the least developed and land locked countries and on many occasions played leading roles. Strict adherence to the principles of the UN Charter, Panchsheel and non-alignment remained the corner stones of Nepal's foreign policy. It would be fair to say that Nepal's firm and unequivocal commitments to its avowed policies helped Nepal gain due respect in all of these international fora.

Due to its geo-political situation, Nepal has to walk a tight rope and with limited maneuverability. Our avowed policy of remaining friendly with both of our immediate neighbors taxed our diplomatic acumen and skill on many occasions. But we have remained firm in our policy with unwavering position although it has landed us in troubles and hardships from time to time. This will continue to be a sticking feature of our relationships with our immediate neighbors. More on that later.

### **Personal accounts and observations - 1965 onwards**

As mentioned earlier, as part of its diplomatic expansion, Nepal opened its diplomatic missions in Bonn and Tokyo in July 1965. I got posted to Bonn to open our new mission and proceeded there along with Ambassador Sardar Bhim Bahadur Pande. We had to start everything from scratch in an alien country without any knowledge of German language. It was not an easy task. But somehow, by a rare diplomatic coincidence, our task was made much easier. What had happened was that just before our arrival in Bonn, 14 Arab countries had all at once broken off diplomatic relations with the Federal Republic of Germany in protest against its establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. As a result, all the local staff working for them became jobless and their diplomatic residences vacant.

This resulted in our chance hiring of an office secretary previously working with the embassy of Saudi Arabia and setting up a chain action of getting a former driver and residence of Saudi Ambassador. This sequence of events and actions made our job much easier.

The above brief administrative account apart, the establishment of a residential mission in Bonn helped us enhance our bilateral relations. Devastated as it was by the Second World War, within 10/12 years of the end of the war, Germany was well on its way to become a strong economic power and by the time we opened our mission in 1965, was being hailed for its “economic miracle”.

Though geographically far apart and in economic terms quite dissimilar, Nepal and Germany had one common feature - that of diplomatic isolation. Nepal due to its self imposed isolationist policy during the Rana regime and Germany in the aftermath of the Second World War. Both the countries had started to widen their external relations, beginning in the fifties and continued in the sixties as well. Perhaps partly because of its situation and also due to its desire to expand its relations with outside countries its welcoming behavior to countries like us was appreciable. They were quite receptive to our suggestions and requests for enhanced cooperation and became involved in many of Nepal’s development projects and other programs.

The courtesy accorded to our then Prince Himalaya ( who was on a private visit) by way of inviting him to an official luncheon by President Luebke, visit of the First Lady Mrs. Luebke to our embassy to join in a lunch hosted by the wife of our ambassador

were instances of Germany's posture towards Nepal. The state visit by President Luebke( the first landing of a Boeing 707 at Tribhuvan Airport) to Nepal in 1967 was a feather in the cap of our bilateral relations.

### **1970s and my UN years (1972-77)**

The 1970s continued to be a period of Nepal's increasing diplomatic activities with a host of incoming and outgoing visits at the highest levels from India, Singapore, Yugoslavia, etc and to China, Kuwait, Cuba (NAM Summit), Japan, Bangladesh. The marriage of Crown Prince Birendra in 1971 and King Birendra's coronation in 1975 helped Nepal project its image to the outside world.

Nepal promptly recognized the newly created nation of Bangladesh in 1971. It showed its courage and ability to arrive at a quick and right decision without any hesitation. She did so in view of the prevailing ground realities and in recognition of the genuine desire of the Bangladeshi people who had undergone inhumane sufferings and severe atrocities under the erstwhile regime. This was another bold move lauded around the world.

King Birendra's proposal to declare Nepal a "Zone of Peace" at the time of his coronation created both a surprise and a sensation. It's main aim was to let Nepal stay clear of any conflicts, not joining any military alliances or political blocs and focus on peaceful development of the nation. Although eventually supported by as many as 116 countries of the world, the proposal could not see the light of the day due to India's intransigent attitude. It is still a viable and a practical proposal for countries like Nepal if only the powers that be would look beyond their narrow self interest.

In the United Nations, Nepal continued to play its active role for the causes of the least developed and land locked countries as well as in the fields of disarmament, apartheid and peaceful resolution of conflicts. Nepal played an active role in the long drawn out Law of the Sea Conference that stretched from 1973 for nine years and were held in New York, Geneva and Caracas. It was Nepal's untiring efforts as Coordinator of the group of LD and LDCs, that the rights to free access to and from the sea and also the recognition of the principle of the seas as a common heritage of mankind could be established under the Law of the Sea Convention of 1982. Ambassador Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya played a crucial role in the negotiations leading to the successful conclusion of an agreement benefiting the interests of the least developed, land locked and the least developed land locked countries.

A notable achievement for Nepal in 1974 was the start of its greater involvement in UN's peace- keeping operations. That year Nepal began to contribute to the UN peace-keeping by agreeing to send a 671 strong contingent to UNEF II in the Golan Heights. It was the first ever Nepal's involvement in such large numbers compared to earlier involvement with just a few personnel as observers. This initiative, also taken under

Ambassador Upadhyaya's leadership drew wide appreciation in the UN circle and helped enhance Nepal's international image considerably. Nepal at present stands on top in terms of the numbers deployed with the UN peacekeeping missions. We should continue to enlarge our involvement and try to remain among the top contributors.

One other issue related to the peace-keeping mission was the issue of pay and perks given to the UN peace keeping personnel. Up until the mid-seventies, salaries and perks of the peace keeping troops varied according to the per capita income of the contributing countries. Thus, for example, Indian troops engaged in Congo would get US \$ 90 per month whereas Swedish or Canadians were paid more than \$700 with the logic that the latter countries had a much larger earning capacity and a commensurate higher standard of living. This was a situation which was not tenable under the principle of equal pay for equal job. The developing countries like Indonesia, Ghana, Nigeria and Nepal took up this case seriously by demanding equal treatment. I was personally involved in negotiations along with representatives of these countries. After prolonged negotiations, the developed countries had to give in to our demand for equal treatment and the salaries and perks for countries like Nepal increased manifold. The current accumulated deposit of Army Welfare Fund, created with some deductions in the troops' salaries, stand at almost 50 billion rupees. This is no small achievement.

As part of its increasing involvement in world affairs, Nepal undertook to host the Colombo Plan Conference in 1978. It was the largest ever international conference to be hosted by Nepal. The smooth manner in which Nepal managed to handle the conference gave a boost to Nepal's self confidence in managing major conferences in the years to come.

### **Looking at the 1980s**

By 1980, Nepal had gone through thirty years of diplomatic relations with a wide range of countries and in the process, accumulated quite a bit of experience in bilateral and multinational relations. This provided Nepal with a certain degree of self confidence and maturity in its external dealings. She continued to play an increasingly active and appreciative role in fora such as the United Nations, Non-aligned Movement, Group of 77, least developed and landlocked countries and so on.

In June 1980, I got posted to our embassy in Washington D.C. as the Deputy Chief of Mission, soon to be followed within a month by Dr. Bhekh Bahadur Thapa as ambassador. President Ronald Reagan was firmly engaged in arms build up with a confrontational attitude towards the Soviet Union which he dubbed as "the evil empire". The Cold War was, in a way, at its height. Pope John Paul II and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's statements and speeches were severely critical of the Soviet Union and Poland's Lech Walesa had defied Polish authorities by calling a unheard of strike at the shipyards of Gdańsk. These acts and events continued to put

severe pressure on the Soviet Union. The trio of President Reagan, Prime Minister Thatcher and Pope John Paul are credited with being the main actors in the fall of the Berlin Wall in October 1990 and the ultimate collapse of the Soviet Union a year later in December 1991.

A little over a year after his inauguration, President Reagan was shot at in an assassination attempt in March 1981 as he walked out of a hotel in Washington D.C. - a mere 200 meters from our embassy. Had he succumbed to the injuries at that time, it would have remained an open question whether the Soviet Union would have collapsed as early as it did in 1991.

In the meanwhile, in Washington, we were quietly engaged in enhancing our bilateral relations. To that end, we felt that nothing could have been better if a state visit from Nepal could be materialized. A chance reading of an article by Helen von Damme, President Reagan's powerful Appointments Secretary, expressing her great wish to travel to Nepal Himalayas woke us up to action. We seized this opportunity and started cultivating her. Ambassador Thapa quietly worked his way up to let the White House agree to such a visit.

State Visits are no easy affairs. They require a lot of consultations and preparations. Even the President has to be tied up for hours in welcome, meetings and banquets. After the assassination shooting, Mrs. Reagan had strictly instructed the State Department not to have more than one state visit per month so as not to overtax the physical stamina of the president. Surely Washington has had more than that many state visits every month. But the new instructions were there to stay. Normally, state visits were to be deliberated upon intensively and proposals, with priorities, had to be forwarded for approval by the White House.

But in our case, it was the other way round. It was the White House that instructed the State Department that the visit of King Birendra be included in the schedule of visits. Although Nepal embassy had good relations with the higher echelons of the State Department, it was obviously difficult for them to put Nepal on the top of the priority list for state visits. Thus it was some sort of a relief for Nepal's well-wishers in the Department and quite a surprise for others when the orders came from the White House. King Birendra was welcomed at the White House on 8 December 1983. It was hard to believe for many State Department officials that Nepal could pull out such a feat.

More than twenty years later, I became the ambassador to the United States in September 2004. During my tenure there, I was invited to the prestigious Georgetown University in September 2005 to give a talk to the post graduate students. The coordinator of the program was an old South Asia hand in the Department, Ambassador Howard Schaffer. I was surprised and became proud when he mentioned, while introducing

me, that the diplomacy and international relations course there had a subject entitled “ Effective practice of diplomacy - a case study of a small country - Nepal”. It was, undoubtedly, our dealings there during the period 1980-86 that must have been so much appreciated by an institution as prestigious as Georgetown University, that they thought it fit to put Nepal as a case study for the conduct of an effective and successful diplomacy.

During the 1980s, Nepal continued to expand its diplomatic contacts. There were state/official visits to Japan, Australia, Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, Philippines, etc. Seven countries of South Asia held its first Summit in Dhaka and adopted the SAARC Charter on 8 December 1985.

### **Establishment of SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu -1987**

The establishment of the SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu in January 1987 was a feather in the cap of Nepal’s diplomatic achievements. As an initiator for the establishment of SAARC (although the idea had been floated around for quite some time, including by King Birendra during the Colombo Plan Consultative Committee meeting in September 1977), Bangladesh and even Colombo had vied for hosting the secretariat. But Nepal, with its diplomatic skill and acumen, was able to let all members agree to locate the secretariat in Kathmandu.

It helped Kathmandu to enhance its image as a regional center.

Subsequently, UN organizations like UNICEF and UNFPA as well as some INGOS located their South Asian regional offices in Kathmandu. Even the US State Department reorganized its regional bureau to include the SAARC countries. Japan’s Foreign Ministry also restructured its organizational structure commensurate with the SAARC membership. These actions were taken in order to address their policies towards SAARC in a more structured manner, notwithstanding their bilateral relations with individual countries. But it, nonetheless, brought limelight to Kathmandu. Nepal hosted the 3rd SAARC Summit in 1987 with great fanfare and ceremony drawing international attention towards Nepal. It is, however, sad to see SAARC stagnate at present to an extent in which members fail to even have a summit meeting for seven years with no possibility in the horizon.

The blockade imposed by India in 1989 in retaliation of Nepal’s purchase of military equipments from China caused severe hardships to the Nepalese people and was a big setback in Nepal-India relations. Although India had imposed a blockade in the early 1970s also, this one was of a much severe nature and lasted for many weeks fueling strong anti-India sentiments among the Nepalese people. In purchasing the equipments from China, Nepal wanted to assert that it was free to buy its military requirements from any source it deemed appropriate.

During 1988-89, Nepal was again elected to the non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council in recognition of its active and positive role in the United Nations.

### **The 1990s**

The decade of the 1990s started with monumental developments in world affairs - fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Dismantling of the USSR prompted thinkers like Francis Fukuyama to declare and write treatise like “The End of History”. The world seemed to have suddenly transformed into a uni-polar from a bipolar system. Non-aligned movement and its ideals seemed to have lost its *raison d’etre*.

These developments began to show their impact around the world. Nepal too could not remain unaffected by them. Eventually, three decade long partyless Panchayat polity was replaced by multi party democratic system. In spite of these far reaching changes in the body politic of the country, there were no changes in its foreign policy. If any, Nepal continued in its traditional policy of foreign relations based on peaceful coexistence, non-interference in others’ internal affairs, principles of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, adherence to the UN Charter and non-alignment movement.

During this period, Nepal, as mentioned earlier, continued to practice its foreign policy despite transformation in its body politic with certain priorities. With the growing awareness that diplomacy need to be oriented towards development, Nepal started to focus on economic diplomacy. It was increasingly being felt that promotion of trade, investment, tourism and economic cooperation should be the focus of economic diplomacy. While the transition to democracy had brought about a systemic change in the body politic of Nepal, it also resulted in instability and endless bickering among political parties thereby pushing the agenda of development to the back burner.

The mid-nineties saw the start of the Maoist insurgency which became a full blown conflict for a decade resulting in a great loss of lives and destruction of infrastructures which sapped Nepal’s already weak and fragile economy and pushed back Nepal’s development by several years. The Maoist conflict also attracted a great deal of international attention. The collapse of the USSR was presumed to bring along the waning of communist ideology and the ascendancy of liberal market economy. But in the case of Nepal, communist ideology was gaining ground with the Maoist in control of large swathes of territories. Foreign powers continued to closely monitor the developments.

In the early months of 1994, I became the Foreign Secretary and continued in that position for 3 years. Maoist movement had not even begun and when started a few months and years later, it did not show the symptoms of a full grown conflict that it did later on. So it was not high on the government agenda then.

Important visits included King Birendra's to China in 1995 and also Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikary's soon after. PM Adhikary visited India in 1996 where Nepal officially proposed to revise the 1950 Treaty with India. It created quite an unease with India. But India was not going anywhere in that matter and remains unaddressed even today. PM Sher Bahadur Deuba attended the golden jubilee of the United Nations in 1995.

The signing of the Mahakali Treaty in 1996 was seen as a good deal for Nepal at that time. It involved prolonged and painstaking negotiations and resulted in India agreeing to Mahakali River as the boundary between the two countries and hence, also agreeing to the principle of equality in sharing the benefits of the river. Although ratified by two thirds majority in the parliament, the treaty soon fell into controversy.

In February of 1997, I retired as Foreign Secretary and got appointed as Ambassador to the European Union and also to the Benelux countries. Our relations with Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg were cordial and free from any controversies. I was focused on economic diplomacy - tourism and trade. Transavia, a subsidiary of KLM started its twice weekly direct flights to Kathmandu in 1998 and continued for a couple of years until it had to close down due to low bookings. Later on, another Dutch company Martin Air also provided services for some time until 2001 but closed down for the same reason.

A group of Dutch investors started the Summit Hotel in the early 1990s and operated it for nearly two decades until they pulled out by selling their shares to the Nepalese businessmen. Started as a boutique hotel amid quaint surroundings, the hotel remains very popular with Dutch and German tourists. The entire hotel is being demolished to give way for a bigger hotel.

Some Belgian traders have invested in small tourist hotels in Kathmandu. Another Belgium is engaged in carpet imports from Nepal in a big scale. A Luxembourg businessman, who later on went on to become our Honorary Consul General there, has the largest carpet showroom in Luxembourg with most of the exhibits from Nepal.

During my tenure in Brussels, the main issue was the derogation from the rules of origin for imports of Nepalese textile products in the European Union countries. For import of goods and products, the European Union had laid down certain rules of origin for developing countries in order to get duty privileges. This meant that exporting countries had to value add in the products they would export - by weaving into textiles from the imported yarn and then produce items like garments.

However, for the least developed countries, there used to be a derogation ( relaxation) of the rules by which they could straightaway import textiles and make garments out of them thus eliminating one process of making textiles out of the yarn. This facility was granted to Nepal for a period of five years only in the hope that in that period Nepal would develop capacity to produce textile out of its imported yarn. Even

after five years, when our capacity to do so was not reached, we had to continue to press the EU for extending this derogation period. This needed lot of negotiations and persuasion to let them agree to the derogation process. We managed to get it extended due to our hard work.

After nearly four and half years in Brussels, I returned to Nepal in April 2002 on completion of my tenure. By the time I returned to Nepal in 2002, I had put in 38 years of service in the diplomatic service with half the time abroad in our missions. I was looking forward to a retired life after all those years of service but it was not to be.

Upon my return to Kathmandu, I started a retired life after almost four decades of service with the government. As I greatly loved travel, I made use of my retirement years in extensive travels in South-east Asia and previously unexplored regions of India. I started a breakfast group with like minded persons to come together now and then and discuss contemporary issues. I also started a Bombay Group consisting of persons who were studying there during the mid-fifties - Dr. Mohamed Mohsin, Dr. Dinesh Nath Gongal, Banwari Lal Mittal, etc to reminisce about our Bombay days and exchange ideas. I also joined the Rotary Club of Patan where I could meet people from different walks of life who had made a mark in their careers. They had become members of the club driven by a urge to serve the society according to the ideals of Rotary. Thus, even as a retired person, I somehow managed to keep myself active and busy.

However, nearly two year after my return from Brussels, I had to take up my assignment as Ambassador to Washington, on the death, after a prolonged illness, of the incumbent and my good friend and colleague Ambassador Jai Pratap Rana.

### **Ambassador in Washington 2004-2006**

Returning to Washington in the summer of 2004, I founded myself in a familiar turf - having served there as the Deputy Chief of mission from 1980 to 1984. There were still some old hands there - some retired but some still working in elevated positions. Also, a lot of persons holding important positions were familiar ones who had served in Kathmandu in the earlier years.

I set upon the usual diplomatic chores with renewed focus on economic diplomacy - trade, investment and tourism. One sticking point was that of duty free access to our garments after 1 January 2005 when the Multi-Fiber Agreement ( under which our garments were allowed to be imported duty-free in the US within the allotted quota system). The expiry of the MFA at the beginning of 2005 suddenly stopped the duty free privilege for our garments thereby severely hitting our exports. We had to lobby different departments of the government as well as the US Congress. This proved to be a long drawn out affair with different pressure groups working at cross purposes.

The Maoist insurgency was at its height during 2004 and this was a matter of concern for the US government. Nepal had procured some arms from the United States and negotiations were on for additional arms.

United States had long been associated with Nepal's development process in different sectors - from health to education to human resource development to infrastructure and agriculture to industry. The Millenium Development Corporation had just been established and Nepal was being considered as one of the countries in our region to be included in its programs. After a long period, an agreement has been signed between the two countries whereby US is to contribute US 500 million dollars and Nepal 130 million dollars for Nepal's infrastructure development- improving road system and constructing transmissions lines linking India. But the fate of the MCC still hangs in balance as it has been highly politicized and its ratification by Nepal's parliament remains uncertain.

A major joint venture between Panda Corporation of Texas and the Soaltee Group had completed the 45 MG capacity Upper Tamakoshi Hydro project. There were some problems regarding payments for purchased power by NEA to the company due to misinterpretation since the permission was for 36 MG only.

The take over of power by then King Gyanendra in February 2005 changed the entire scenario in Washington. It set off a host of negative reactions in Washington's governmental, congressional, media and NGOs circles. All of a sudden, it seemed Nepal became the subject of everybody's interest and concern. I had to face groups like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group, Asia Society as well as the State Department and the Senate. I did appear at the live interview of CNN. I was front-paged on the weekly Diplomatic Courier. The Nepalese diaspora also were up in their arms against the King's move.

I really had a tough and testing time. But I had felt that I had carried out my duties only as a professional. After Girija Prasad Koirala became the Prime Minister, I, along with 11 other Nepalese ambassadors were recalled and I returned to Kathmandu in June 2006. I said then and would say even today - no regret and no complaint.

### **Nepal's Foreign Policy - An Analysis**

Many years ago, someone at the top hierarchy of Nepal asked me whether Nepal had a foreign policy. A few years later, also a top personality of Nepal raised the same question to me. These queries compelled me to ponder over the matter - is it that Nepal does not have a foreign policy? I always felt otherwise and do so today as well.

My observation is that Nepal has a clearly articulated foreign policy based on adherence to the principles of the UN, NAM, peaceful coexistence, national sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference in the internal affairs of others and peaceful resolution of conflicts (Panchsheel tenets). While saying so, it has also to be borne in

mind that within the broad framework of these principles, a country's foreign policy does change or gets modified in terms of greater or lesser focus to issues, a certain tilt, priority, preferences as and when required in the overall national interests, as and when situation demands.

Foreign relations are guided by foreign policy which in turn, is shaped by a country's national interests. We have come a long way from the early fifties to the modern times in asserting ourselves in the conduct of our foreign policy. The construction of the road to Tatopani road linking the Tibetan border and removal of the Indian check-posts from our northern borders were some of the earlier acts that Nepal took in that regard. As time went on, we started to act independently and on our own, on many of the world issues in forums like the UN on issues like declaring the Indian Ocean as a nuclear-free zone, transit rights of the land locked countries to and from the sea. We were able to separate the trade and transit treaties with India which had hitherto been lumped together. We felt more confident as time passed and started to act with greater acumen in our dealings with the outside world and more specifically with our immediate neighbors.

Our geo-political situation compels us to walk a tight rope. China is a rising world power, poised to match its GDP with that of the United States in the next 12/15 years. It's huge investments in enhancing its military capacity will also make it a formidable military power. On the other hand, India is fast rising as a global economic power and is expected to replace UK as the world's fifth largest economy. Situated as we are between these two rising nations, we should be able to benefit from the economic progress made by them by catching the opportunity of enhanced trade and investment with both the countries. Let us briefly discuss the different and probable neighborhood, regional and world scenarios that are likely to impact us.

### **Nepal-India-China Relations**

History shows that bulk of our external relations and dealings have been with India. This is due to our close historical, cultural and social ties. The open border and free movement of people is of a unique nature in the world. Consequently, the relations between the two countries are of multi-faceted and multi-dimensional nature. Closeness have also brought about, on many occasions, various problems, differences, unpleasant situations and misunderstandings. We have also gone through unwanted interference and high-handedness on occasions.

The visit of India's Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar, as Prime Minister's special envoy, just days before the adoption of Nepal's Constitution, to pressure Nepal to defer to do so is a blatant exercise in arm twisting diplomacy. The blockade that followed soon after has left a deep chasm in our bilateral relations no matter how much India tries to stay clean in this matter.

The slow pace in our trade and power negotiations is really painful. Why does it take such delay in implementing many of the projects that India has agreed to ? How do we explain delays in cases such as the preparation of the DPR of the Pancheshwar project? It was supposed to be ready within six months of the signing of the Mahakali Treaty in 1996. Even if the Maoist conflict may be an excuse, we have come a long way since peace was restored. A new constitution has been adopted and an elected government is in place. Gujral doctrine of non-reciprocity in dealings with smaller neighbors had given fresh hope of a new beginning but it was already dead on arrival.

The blame for this less than happy situation also lies with our side. There are elements in our country whose actions and utterances invite such behavior from across the border. Our foreign policy has to be based on and guided by our national interests. When a matter is of vital interest to our security and national interests, we must come together and speak with one voice. We must be confident enough to feel and act in a manner that would send signals to all that we are capable of solving our internal issues ourselves without any outside interference or involvement.

We are aware that India has some sensitive concerns in Nepal. We should convince India of our full and unwavering commitment to address her genuine concerns. But she should stay away from trying to micromanage things here. Since 1951, much waters have flown down the rivers of Koshi and Mahakali and Nepal's ability to handle both its internal issues and external relations have grown exponentially.

Our relations with our other immediate neighbor China has been cordial and friendly. Having signed the Nepal - China Boundary Agreement way back in 1961, we have no border problems. She has been a generous partner in our development activities. Lately, during the last 12/15 years, Nepal's trade with China has skyrocketed, although vastly in the latter's favour. It is evident in the Nepalese market places which are flooded with Chinese goods.

Talking about trade activities, it would be relevant here to keep in mind the growing volume of bilateral trade between India and China- currently in the neighborhood of 100 billion dollars and still growing year after year. Situated as it is between these two rapidly growing huge economies, Nepal should try to extract maximum benefits from its geographical location. Even if we are able to let a fraction of the ongoing trade exchanges between India and China pass through Nepal, we would stand to achieve substantial gain. Of course, we will have to build appropriate infrastructure to facilitate such trade exchanges.

The BRI put forth by China has initiated serious discussions all over. Nepal has also thrown its lot with this initiative with or without fully understanding its full implications. How and in what manner will Nepal be involved in it, the project identifications, the modalities of construction, supervision, operating, handling and financing are immensely complicated issues. We need to be very clear about all these

aspects before making any firm commitments. We should also bear in mind some of the sensitive issues of China and must assure the latter of our avowed policy of addressing her concerns.

We also need to closely watch, study and interpret India-China relations as it will impact us in all manners. As I see it, in the near and not too distant future, India and China will carry forward their relations on the basis of a) cooperation side by side with b) competition with occasional c) confrontation but not leading to a major d) conflict.

India and China will cooperate with each other in the international arena in areas such as trade and environment where their interests converge vis-a- vis the western powers. But they will compete with each other in expanding their influence in the region and beyond. Under her “look east” policy, India’s extended contacts with countries like Australia, Vietnam, Philippines and Thailand, growing naval presence in the Indian Ocean and South-east Asian region are examples of its increasingly assertive moves. China’s BRI and the so called “string of pearls” moves are aimed and asserting itself in the region and beyond. They will confront each other with the occasional skirmishes in the border areas. However, it is unlikely to result in a full scale conflict as they are both aware of the grave risks involved in such actions.

### **China - US Relations and the Changing World Order.**

The trajectory of China-US relations in the days ahead is something we should be closely following since it will have a bearing in our dealings with both of these countries. The phenomenal rise of China as a world economic and military power has given a lot of disquiet to the United States. The latter now sees China as its main rival. China’s growing assertiveness in the region and beyond has prompted United States to take counter measures like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue comprising the United States, Japan, Australia and India. Lately, Nepal is also being drawn into this push and pull game. Nepal has already become a party to China’s belt and road initiative. Now, the United States is trying to lure Nepal into the Quad ambit. The unusual gesture of the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo inviting then Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali for talks in Washington is a clear indication of US attempts to woo Nepal. It will not be in the overall interests of Nepal to link up with such arrangements in any way whatsoever.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the world for a while, seemed to have become a unipolar one with the United States calling the shots on most occasions. The phenomenal growth of China and the gradual shift of wealth towards the east (China, Japan, Korea, India, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, etc) slowly showed the trends of an evolving multi polar world. The present scenario still puts the United States at the top with China slowly but steadily catching up. The next in order would be the European Union, Japan and India in economic terms with Russia in military terms. The BRICS Group, if able to act in unison (which is unlikely, except

in economic terms), would be a formidable force in world affairs. Rising economies like Turkey, Indonesia, Mexico and Nigeria would be in the next line of countries in the pecking order. What seems clear is that in the days ahead , the trend is that of a multi-polar world with US and China at the top with a host of other nations/ groups wielding their own power and say in regional and world affairs.

The establishment of the BRICS Bank and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, both headquartered in China seem to be potential rivals to the post-Second World War Bretton Woods institutions like the World Bank and the the IMF. The launching of the BRI has raised a whole range of questions, doubts and misgivings. Also, multiple setups and groups like SAARC, BIMSTEC, BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) and their workings directly impact Nepal.

Under these varying and changing scenarios, what should be the course of Nepal's foreign policy in the days ahead ? I venture to make a few suggestions below.

1. Our policy and actions must be based on and guided by our overall national interests. No deviation or exception in this regard. We have to build a national consensus and speak with one voice in matters relating to our foreign policy.
2. Maintain a balanced relationship with both of our immediate neighbors while taking into account their sensitivities and concerns.
3. Be alert so as not to be caught in an awkward position in the web of the emerging complex world like e.g. QUAD and the BRI - initiatives of the super power USA and the rising power China.
4. Play an increasingly pro-active role in our regional organizations/ groups like SAARC, BIMSTEC and BBIN. As current chairman of SAARC, Nepal should play the lead role in reactivating SAARC.
5. Pursue more vigorously economic diplomacy by enhancing our capability.
6. While focusing on our immediate neighbors, not to lose sight of the region beyond - ASEAN, Korea , Japan, Australia and of course the European Union as well as Russia.
7. Continue to play an active and useful role in the UN and its sister organizations.
8. Develop our diplomatic capabilities. Political appointees to the ambassadorial post cannot be done away with but should be gradually reduced. However, such appointments must be made strictly on the basis of merit.

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# Nepal's Agenda at the United Nations

Issues and Positions in the 76<sup>th</sup> Session of the  
UN General Assembly, 2021



- Madhu Raman Acharya<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Context:

As usual, the 76th Session of the General Assembly is being held in usual structure and format. The theme of this year's General Assembly is "Building resilience through hope – to recover from COVID-19, rebuild sustainably, respond to the needs of the planet, respect the rights of people and revitalize the United Nations". This theme will be the focus of the General Debate and the High-Level Dialogue to be held from 21 -27 September at the UN's headquarters in New York. There will be main events and high-level meetings of racial discrimination energy, food systems, and a commemoration on international day for total elimination of nuclear weapons.

Perhaps, there will be no bigwigs in the UN Assembly this year, mostly because the session is being held in so-called "hybrid" format, in which many world leaders will make appearances virtually and smaller number of delegates will attend the same in person. As such, the United Nations has been routinely sidelined by the leaders of powerful countries often meeting in formats outside the UN in the banner of G7 and G20 before the UN assembly. They discuss and agree on most issues beforehand and some even choose not to attend the UN assembly, mainly for that reason.

A special feature in this year's assembly in New York is that this year's President of the General Assembly will be a South Asian, Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid of the Maldives, who defeated another South Asian candidate from South Asia, from Afghanistan. South Asia is also in the spotlight this year due to the situation in Afghanistan.

This year's UN assembly is being held at a special juncture in the aftermath of coronavirus pandemic and intense global attention to the situation in Afghanistan due to the Taliban takeover after the U.S. departure from the embattled South Asian country. This will also be the first UN Assembly for the U.S. President Joe Biden, who is supposed to be more pro-UN than his predecessor Donald Trump, who had withdrawn from several multilateral pacts brokered at the UN and undermined the

<sup>1</sup> Prepared on the basis of presentation made at a seminar organized on the subject by the Association of Former Career Ambassadors of Nepal (AFCAN) on 12 September 2021. Mr. Acharya was Foreign Secretary and Ambassador to Bangladesh and Ambassador/Permanent Representative to the UN (2005-2019)

UN's role cutting its funds and scuttling its mandates in peace, security, human rights and development mission around the world. This has also been a year of reflection on multilateralism after the UN completed 75 years last year. Some six in ten respondents in a UN survey last year had said that the UN had made the world a better place and almost everybody in the survey said that it needed to do even better.

As a preview, last year, the UN members had identified twelve areas of priority for the post-75 UN. That included leaving no one behind, protecting planet, promoting peace and preventing conflicts, abiding by international law and justice, placing women and girls at the centre, building trust, improving digital cooperation, upgrading the UN into UN 2.0, ensuring sustainable financing, boosting partnerships, listening and working with youth and being prepared for future eventualities.

For this year, the UN's Secretary-General has identified certain priorities for the UN. That includes issue related to COVID-19, inclusive and sustainable economic recovery, making peace with nature, tackling poverty and inequality, reversing the assault on human rights, gender equality, geopolitical rifts, nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, digital technologies and their growing dangers and starting a reset for the 21st century. Some of those priorities are also Nepal's priorities for multilateralism and its multilateral diplomacy. In his report entitled "Our Common Agenda" on the future of global governance after 75 years of UN, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has highlighted issues for the UN for next 25 years, including in future of global cooperation, inclusive, reinvigorated, networked and effective multilateralism, post-coronavirus world challenges, thinking big and strengthening global governance. In that report, he has also put some warnings saying that the world has reached "an inflection point" in which humanity is in a point of breakdown due to various crises including that of climate change. In its sixth assessment report, the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has signaled "Code Red" for humanity as it is threatening our existence with what has been described as too little and too late response". In the UN report, the Secretary-General has put forward a few recommendations including a summit for future and global consensus for a new social contract on multilateralism.

## **2. UN's Agenda:**

As usual, the agenda of the 76th session contains 176 main items and many sub-items that have been carried over from the previous years with hardly any new additions. Among other things, one of the main challenges for Nepali delegation to the UN assembly is to decide as to how to engage in so many agenda items, including that from the deep sea to the outer space. Nepal cannot engage in all the issues with same interests and indulgence. In view of limited time, capacity and number of delegates, Nepal has to exercise certain selectivity in exercising the best use of time and available resources during its participation in the UN assembly. In that regard, Nepal must

choose to focus on issues that are in its national interests, in which we have capacity to contribute and comparative advantage or niche. Among them, some agenda items need special mention with Nepal's interests.

### **2.1. Managing the aftermath of the COVID-19:**

Since last year, the threat of coronavirus pandemic has occupied the indulgence and imagination of people around the UN including that at the UN. It has also exposed the weaknesses and shortcomings in global governance and global multilateralism. The threat of the virus persists because it is reappearing in new waves and mutations, some of them in more deadlier forms than earlier. The pandemic has inflicted set back on many agenda that UN has been advancing including in sustainable development. The UN is at a "blind spot" as to what to do with economic recovery from the pandemic, that has caused severe downturns and job and business losses around the world. The UN put together a global humanitarian response of two billion US dollars, which has been peanuts compared to the scale of challenge. The UN was at the back seat during global cooperation for the development vaccines against the deadly virus. When vaccines were developed-thanks to cooperation among the scientific and business community-the UN was startled as to what to do with an equitable distribution of jabs to poorer countries. Other than declaring coronavirus vaccines as "global public goods" and calling for an equitable distribution of the same, the UN could not intervene in the global system as many people in several developing countries struggled for vaccines whereas there was excess in stock of the same in developed countries. UN's vaccine diplomacy could not unlock export and intellectual property restrictions that could have helped an easier circulation of the jabs. UN's much-touted COVAX facility was not of much help in the beginning, as it could not eliminate what were described as "Vaccine Apartheid" and "Vaccine Nationalism". Instead, UN itself was subject to intense politicization and political rivalry, especially with regard to investigations on the source-tracing of the coronavirus and in the blame game between big powers in the World Health Assembly. The UN Security Council could not even adopt a statement on the pandemic, whereas it had declared the Ebola virus epidemic in Africa as a threat to international peace and security and had called for international cooperation. The UN has done little to prepare for future pandemics, let alone rethink of global governance and global cooperation on such global emergencies. Like most world leaders are expected to dwell on the matter, Nepal should press the UN to overcome these shortcomings. Multilateralism is required more than ever before. The UN is needed to play even more stronger role in this many other issues.

### **2.2. Urgency to act on climate change issues:**

While climate change remained a big issue at the UN, the implementation of the 2015 Paris Agreement hangs on balance even though it had promised little to fight the global crisis. Ahead of the 26th Conference of Parties (CoP26) to be held in Glasgow

in Oct-Nov 2021, the UN members should press for raising ambitions including in lowering the temperature rise to 1.5 degree Celsius before the industrial levels and in stepping up climate finance to \$ 100 billion a year. The “net zero” declaration by many big players and the UN Secretary-General’s call for the same by 2050 should be heeded, mostly by big polluting countries. Nepal’s own pledge of “net zero” by 2045, as expressed in its second commitment communicated to the UNFCCC Secretariat, should be highlighted. Some 110 countries have declared carbon neutrality by 2050 so far. The CoP26 should be pushed to put an end to fossil fuel. Climate change action should not suffer due to the coronavirus pandemic. Nepal must endeavour to highlight its climate vulnerability, including that from melting of glaciers, snow caps, and permafrost as well as its adverse effects on precipitation, agriculture, livelihood and water sources as well as reoccurrence of climate-induced disasters including this years’ Melamchi floods. Nepal must keep on pressing for a sustained and robust climate financing, including for its adaption needs, that it has incurred without being responsible for global warming. This should also serve as an opportunity to reiterate the future of the Sagarmatha Dialogue on climate change that Nepal’s government had proposed earlier. Nepal should do more in its climate diplomacy, something demonstrated by the fact that Nepal was not invited to U.S. President Joe Biden’s climate event in July, despite its showcasing of climate change action in various fronts. Nepal should reinforce its positions at the upcoming CoP26 to be held in Glasgow.

### **2.3. Future of the implementation of the SDGs:**

Among other things, the coronavirus pandemic has undermined the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is also likely to affect the funding commitments that is required for implementing the SDGs globally. The G20 had come up with a debt suspension initiative to relieve developing countries of their unsustainable debt that could help them finance and implement the SDGs. That remains to be implemented. More innovative ways of financing SDGs including the fulfillment pledges for partnerships should be upheld by the developed partner countries. The UN should help steer dialogue to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs in the remaining period. The high-level event on energy and food at the UN assembly is expected to support the implementation of the SDGs. Nepal should take part in this event and press for more sustained financing for food security and other SDGs.

### **2.4. Situation in Afghanistan:**

The situation in Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover of that country following the U.S. withdrawal will be in the agenda of the UN this year, as many world leaders and delegates are expected to dwell on the matter. The foremost concern should be on the safe exit of foreign and Afghan nationals trapped in the situation and on the humanitarian crisis impinging in the embattled country after the Taliban takeover. The UN Security Council statement on the situation in Afghanistan, though inadequate,

covers for safe passages of foreigners, and urges Taliban to respect human rights and rights of women, to provide humanitarian access in the country, not to provide safe haven to terrorists and not engage in terrorist activities itself. The UN and the international community must remain vigilant that Afghanistan does not become a failed state and a centre for exporting extremism and terrorism. Neither should be allowed to remain a hot spot of world security. The UN must do its part in stabilizing that country including through its peacekeeping and political support, though UN has been forced to relocate its mission to Kazakhstan temporarily. The UN must continue to play life-saving role in Afghanistan. As a fellow member country of SAARC, which it is chairing, Nepal should explore ways to assist the people of Afghanistan though the sideline meeting of the SAARC foreign ministers in New York, if that can be held, or through the UN if that cannot take place.

### **2.5. Peacekeeping:**

We should continue to highlight our unwavering commitment to UN's international peace and security agenda through our continued participation to the UN peacekeeping, in which we have secured the position of the second largest troop-contributing country this year. Leveraging this elevation as the second largest troop-contributor, Nepal should ask for more leadership positions including at the level of the Secretary-General's Special Representative (SRSG) and their deputies in the UN peace missions. Nepal should also showcase its inclusive appointment in the Nepali Army and security forces and strive to increase female participation in army and police forces in UN peace missions, for which UN has attached high priority for gender equality.

### **2.6. Nepal's graduation from the LDCs**

This is the final year of the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA) for the decade 2011-21 adopted by the Fourth UN Conference on the LDCs, when Nepal was chairing the Global Bureau of the LDCs at the UN. Though that agenda remains unfinished and needs to be pushed forward in the Fifth UN conference on the LDCs due to be held in March 2022, Nepal itself qualified for graduation from the category of the world's poorest countries meeting two three criteria in the three consecutive reviews held by the UN's Committee on Development Policy (CDP) in 2015, 2018 and 2021, and has been recommended for graduation in 2026 with a transition period of five years. Though Nepal has not met the Income Criterion in terms per capita Gross National Income (GNI), it has comfortably met the Human Assets Index and Economic Vulnerability Index. In the UN assembly, Nepal should highlight this milestone achievement in its development trajectory, while reiterating need for continued international support during the five-year transition period and beyond, mainly because Nepal has not met the Economic Criteria, as the country's per capita GNI at the time of the last review stood at \$ 1,027 against the threshold of \$ 1224. Nepal should also highlight its goals of becoming a Middle-Income Country by 2030 and need for a supportive international environment for that.

## **2.7. Follow-up on the LLDCs issue**

The UN Secretary-General's mid-term report of the subject has showed mixed progress and shortfalls in the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for the Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) for the decade 2014-24. Nepal should press for sincere implementation of the Vienna commitments in the remaining period of the global compact for the LLDCs. Just as it did in the group of the LDCs, Nepal should strive to play leadership role for the cause of the landlocked developing countries and enhance its "transit diplomacy" in multilateral format at the UN.

## **2.8. Human rights and humanitarian issues:**

Nepal has put significant premium on human rights at the UN agenda. With this credential, Nepal has been elected member of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) twice. As a sitting member of the HRC, Nepal's voting pattern at the UN resolutions has been a matter of concern of the international human rights community. For example, Nepal's vote on resolutions on Myanmar does not promote its image as a sitting member of the HRC, for we are not there to defend human rights violating regimes. If Nepal's consistent position is to remain away from country-specific resolutions it to be pursued as a matter of principle, Nepal should do the same in the case of Israel as well. Perhaps Nepal needs to explain its vote with a condition that its abstention in country-specific resolutions does not purport to the human rights violating regimes as such. Nepal should be able to leverage its position as a member of the HRC to dispense with the pending issues of its own domestic transitional justice matters, in which the attention of the international human rights community continues to persist, as the status of the commissions on truth and reconciliation and enforced disappearances have yet to be settled conclusively. Nepal should also highlight its implementation of the recommendations adopted at the last Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the HRC, while reiterating its commitments to the international agenda on human rights.

On bigger humanitarian problems, Nepal should speak up for meeting the funding gaps between what is needed (\$ 35 billion) and what is raised (\$ 18 billion) annually to meet the humanitarian assistance needs to 235 million people affected by conflicts and disasters and refugees and internally displaced people worldwide.

## **2.9. Disarmament:**

Nepal must continue to highlight its positions on global disarmament agenda at the UN, especial because the annual global military spending has reached a whopping \$1,981 billion, as a fraction of that amount could be help resolve many of the world's multilateral problems and global financing for development if there was sincere global will for disarmament. Nepal should also support the implementation of nuclear ban treaty adopted at the UN a few years ago. We must also push for the activation of the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament (UNRCPD) that is located in

Nepal's capital and the Kathmandu Process of regional disarmament. Though Nepal itself is not a party to negotiations, Nepal should continue to call for reactivation of the stalled disarmament agenda at the UN.

### **2.10. Migration debate:**

The adoption of the Global Compact on Migration (GCM) in 2018 was an important milestone in the global migration agenda. Even though the compact was very weak in its entirety, the implementation of the GCM has been sidelined and there has been marked rise of racial discrimination, xenophobia and hate crimes against migrant communities cross the world. Nepal should continue to reiterate for sincere implementation of the GCM for safe, orderly and well-managed migration that will serve as a win-win for both countries of origin and countries, as was stated in the global compact itself.

### **2.11. Other miscellaneous agenda items:**

Many other agenda items of the General Assembly that have been carried over from the previous years have some relevance to Nepal. That includes matters related to peace and security, international law, development, human rights, humanitarian issues and other miscellaneous issues. Nepal should continue to dwell on those agenda with a view of advancing its national interest and comparative advantage and niche in the respective issues.

### **2.12. Reform of the UN:**

Nepal has been consistently supporting reforms in the UN, in which progress has remained pending. The reform process at the UN should take into account the challenges in multilateralism including the coronavirus pandemic experiences for promoting global public goods. In his report *Our Common Agenda*, UN's Secretary-General has floated some ideas some of which are mostly abstract and need to be concretized. Some other ideas such as the proposal for the revival of the Trusteeship Council with a new mandate is unrealistic. We need "inclusive multilateralism" and to revive the stalled multilateralism and weak multilateral diplomacy at the UN. The UN needs to reform itself taking into account recommendations and experiences gathered after its 75 years in existence with a view to making it a truly global institution that can help steer global solutions to many global and multilateral problems that we confront today.

## **3. Sideline business**

The UN's assembly each year also provides an opportunity for its Member States to promote their bilateral and sidelines contacts and businesses. As the chair of SAARC, Nepal should seek to convene the ministerial meeting of the foreign ministers of

eight SAARC countries with a view to finding ways to explore to convene the stalled summit of the regional association. If held, it should also explore discussing ways to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan to show solidarity to the people of that country in the recent aftermath of the country's humanitarian crisis. As usual, Nepal should seek to arrange bilateral meetings with the leader of Nepali delegation with the counterpart delegations as much as possible. There will be ministerial meetings of the NAM, G77, the LDCs etc. in which Nepal should participate to advance its interests and positions. Nepal should also take benefit from many side events and make prudent use of its delegates to the UN assembly, including through written guideline for their conduct during the session.

#### **4. Conclusion**

To conclude, for Nepal, participation at the UN's annual general assembly is a big opportunity to advance its interests and priorities in multilateral diplomacy and in the agenda of international peace and security, development, human rights, international law and many other issues. Among other things, Nepal should prioritize in highlighting the importance of better cooperation on COVID-19 response, including to build back better, enhance access to vaccines including through the UN's COVAX facility. Nepal should remain careful in not being dragged into sides in political rivalry, politicization and controversy over investigations etc. on the coronavirus pandemic. Nepal should stress the attainment of SDGs through sincere implementation which should not be dragged by the COVID situation. Nepal must highlight the importance of climate change action including access to global funds available for adaptation and for raising ambitions in climate action in the CoP26 to be held in Glasgow. We should leverage our second position in the troop-contributing countries to UN's peace operations and to take benefits including in senior appointments in them. Nepal should highlight its development gains on graduation from the LDCs while reiterating the continued international support for its transition period of five years. As sitting member of the HRC, we should reiterate our commitment to human rights, correct our voting pattern at the UN and dispose the conflict era cases as soon as possible. Stabilization of Afghanistan and solidarity with the people of that country in humanitarian need should be our priority with regard to situation in the war-torn country. We should continue to claim that the UN reforms should suit the present challenges and that the activities and programmes of the UN's agencies, funds and programs benefit us. We must continue to press for UN reforms for revival of multilateralism and international cooperation. We should maximize the UN forum in bilateral, informal and regional formats as well.

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## Protocol Issues, Presentation of Credentials and Vienna Conventions



- Mohan Krishna Shrestha<sup>1</sup>

States, with well defined boundaries, were born only after the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 A.D. Thereafter, states began exercises to exchange Ambassadors. Yet, rules for protocol could not take any shape for long.

In the lack of protocol, previously there had been many occasions when melees pursued and in frantic moments to go first, fights erupted and chaos ruled. In worst events, even Ambassadors were used to be arrested and killed during functions and parades. Threats used to be issued for wars. Such chaos ruled for long in the lack of any treaty on protocol issues in old days.

In one old bizzare incident in a country, in the lack of any specified protocol, Host government and Ambassadors could not decide who would go, first, for the function because there was not anything like accepted protocol. So, it was decided to cut 25 gates leading to the main hall enabling all Ambassadors to enter into room at the same time.

Taking into consideration such grave situations leading to nightmarish scenarios, the then leaders seriously realized an acute need for concluding an international treaty on protocol. Consequently, they talked and negotiated one in 1815 known as the Congress of Vienna and signed in it. This first ever treaty provided a sound base for formal international protocol.

The term protocol is derived from the Greek word "Protokollan". Normally such diplomatic words come either from French or Latin. However, the word protocol seems to be an exception.

Understanding the rules of protocol is essential to conducting diplomacy. Protocol encompasses everything from knowing how to greet properly to high ranking foreign dignitaries, understanding foreign customs or having suitable seating arrangements at a state functions. Protocol is the framework by which international relations are conducted. It is an accepted set of rules which makes the state diplomatic functions and ceremonies easier to conduct on the basis of seniority.

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<sup>1</sup> Former Ambassador to France and Chief of Protocol, MOFA

In international politics, protocol is the etiquette of diplomacy and state affairs. A protocol is a rule which clarifies how an activity should be performed, especially in the field of diplomacy. Protocols specify the proper and generally accepted behavior in matters of state such as showing appropriate respect to the high state dignitaries, ranking diplomats in chronological order of their accreditation and so on. Protocol is also a set of international courtesy rules which are well-established and time-honored. These rules have made it easier for nations and people to live and work together. Part of protocol has always been the acknowledgment of the hierarchical standing.

Protocols rules are based on the principles of civility. There are two meanings of the word protocol. In the legal sense, it is defined as an international agreement that supplements or amends a treaty. In the diplomatic sense, the term refers to the set of rules, procedures, conventions and ceremonies that relate to relations between states. In general, protocol represents the recognized and generally accepted system of international courtesy. Protocol is a subject full of sensitivity. Internet Protocol has also come, these days, which guides the use of internet use.

### **Usage of Protocol**

Protocol is necessary everywhere be it in the home, office, society, the country and, at large, in the world. If there is no protocol, our societies and countries can run amok. Like in any country, our diplomacy and protocol issues are being dealt by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Under the Ministry, there are 30 Embassies, 3 Permanent Missions (New York, Geneva and Vienna) and 6 Consul General Offices (Hong Kong, Lhasa, Kolkata, Jeddah, New York and Guangzhou). Similarly there are 26 foreign Embassies in Kathmandu, SAARC Secretariat, United Nations Development Program Office, UN Regional Peace and Disarmament Center, offices of other International organizations and INGOs. Moreover, there are about 40 Hon. Consul Offices in Kathmandu. Nepal also has similar number of Hon. Consuls/Consul General in many countries. They are also part of our diplomacy and protocol.

To deal with protocol matters, we have a separate Protocol Division in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Chief of Protocol is the main person in charge of protocol matters. I worked as COP for about 10 months between 2009 to 2010 before being appointed as Ambassador to France. MOFA has its own protocol.

Hon'ble Minister for Foreign Affairs is the political master of the ministry. While Secretary is the administrative head of the Ministry. There are several Joint Secretaries, Under Secretaries and other officials. When Secretary is out of the country, Joint Secretary second in seniority works as Officiating Foreign Secretary. Joint Secretaries are the heads of the political divisions.

Protocol Division of the Ministry has multifarious activities. Foremost important works of the division are management and arrangement for visits of VVIPs both out-going and in-coming. Similarly, an arrangement for the presentation of the credentials by foreign Ambassador to Rt. Hon. President is yet another important work. Division also prints diplomatic book which gives details about the diplomatic corps, international organizations and other foreign institutions with regard to their personnel (now it has been made online). Division also provides protocol and consular assistance to diplomatic corps as per Vienna Conventions. Management of services and facilities to diplomatic corps and their family including issuing of visas are being dealt by the division. Request by foreign diplomatic missions for meeting with Nepali high dignitaries must also be processed through the protocol division. This is a simple rule understood by every diplomat. The division efficiently handles such requests.

### **Credential Presentation**

One of the main functions of the Protocol Division is to arrange the presentation of Credentials by Foreign Ambassador to our Rt. Hon. President. There are two types of Ambassadors. Resident Ambassadors who are based in Kathmandu and Non-Resident Ambassadors who are based in New Delhi, Colombo, Islamabad and Dhaka. In our protocol, always Resident Ambassadors come first. Protocol Division also deals with regard to the Appointment of foreign Ambassadors (processing to give agreement) to Nepal as well as Appointment of Nepali Ambassadors to foreign countries.

I remember one good experience while working as Deputy Chief of Protocol in 2005. Three non-resident Ambassadors came to Kathmandu from New Delhi by same flight. Venezuelan Ambassador Milena Santana Ramirez descended from the plane first. Other two Ambassadors followed her. She quietly told me that she was the first one to arrive. She meant that in protocol, she must be first. We also have the same system. When several Ambassadors arrive for the presentation of the credential, we give first priority to the one who sets foot in our soil.

We have short but very impressive function with regard to the presentation of the credential. Once the date of the presentation of the credential is fixed, Protocol Division informs Ambassadors in Kathmandu (if any new one) and Non-Resident Ambassadors in New Delhi. After getting confirmation, Ambassadors are gathered in a designated hotel about one and half hours before hand. Protocol Officers take care of them. From Hotel, either official cars or horse-driven coach takes Ambassador, his/her spouse to the Presidential Palace (Shital Niwas). COP receives Ambassador and leads to the place where President will be standing. They walk very cautiously and slowly. Once they reach in front of the President, they bow to the President. COP introduces Ambassador-designate to the President. Then, President and Ambassador exchange greetings. Ambassador-designate handover his/her credential. A photo session takes place. Ambassador is introduced to other high state dignitaries. President invites

Ambassador for tea/coffee. Extension of hands by the President means the session is over. COP takes Ambassador to the same place where he received and handover to the Protocol Officer. Ambassador signs guest book. Army band gives a salute. The Ambassador leaves Presidential Palace with flag fluttering in the car. Within 15 to 20 minutes, the ceremony is accomplished.

## **Experience of Credential Presentations**

### **France**

I reached Paris on 17 June 2010 and news came that credential presentation ceremony will be held on 2 July 2010 at the Elysees Palace in Paris. Such a short duration was a record in itself as Protocol officers said to me. Normally, due to the busy schedules of the President, it takes months to make such ceremony.

Once function date is fixed from Presidential Palace, waiting Ambassadors are informed. A protocol officer comes to the Embassy for briefing. Cars and motor-cycles arrive in scheduled time. On that fine early morning of 2<sup>nd</sup> July, gurgling sounds of 4 giant moto-cycles attracted the attention of our neighbourhood. Neighbours came to Varandah to see why so much sound near the residence of Nepali Ambassador from the early morning. In fact, police escorts and two official cars arrived in front of our residence to fetch me and to take to the Elysees Palace.

Ambassador goes to the Elysees Palace in time. Upon arrival at the palace, Ambassadors are being received by the Chief of the Protocol and other officials very warmly. All Ambassador-designates are led to be assembled in a room. COP requests to Ambassadors to stand in the allotted number/place in the carpet.

President Nicolas Sarkozy came accompanied by the COP and a Minister. COP introduced Ambassador to the President. President and Ambassador can exchange greetings. President receives credentials from the same place and hand over to the COP. A small reception is organized. Thereafter, Ambassadors are requested to go to their original place for standing. Again President comes and say good-bye. At that moment, Ambassadors can speak for greetings. But many miss the opportunity due to shortage of time. During our credential presentation ceremony, there were a total of 15 Ambassadors (Resident and Non-Resident). Later on, as I heard, the number swelled to 24 Ambassadors at one time. Now, the ceremony also seems to have been modified.

### **Greece**

Greek Foreign Ministry informed that next credential ceremony will be held on 18 July 2012. I along with my wife and daughter reached Athens in time. Foreign Ministry was close to Presidential Palace. President Carlos Papulias was a famous politician, who has had already served 15 years as Foreign Minister. On designated day, I was

taken by the Protocol officials to the Presidential Palace. It was a nice building with congenial surroundings. Guards were all tall guys standing with lancets with Greek national costumes.

There were five non-resident Ambassadors and I was first in the order. At the exact time, President arrived and I presented my Letter of Credence and conveyed the good wishes from our President. He replied in the same way. After all Ambassadors presented their credentials, a small ceremony was held. President moved to another place and he was flanked by senior officials of the Palace and Foreign Ministry including Foreign Minister. President and All Ambassadors faced each other. President spoke and expressed Greece's readiness to work hand in hand with all countries for the world peace, stability and economic development. All Ambassadors were given short time to express their views also. I felt it was a noble program and not seen elsewhere. After the ceremony was over, a reception was held where President too came for chats.

### **Monaco**

Monagasque Foreign Ministry informed me about the presentation of the credential ceremony to be held on 15 May 2012. Subsequently we reached Monte Carlo, the capital city on time. On the designated day, a carcade came to our hotel Novotel and we were escorted to the Palace of His Serene Highness. It was situated atop a hill commanding beautiful scenery of Monaco and Mediterranean sea. It was a pleasant day and early morning sunlight provided enough warmth. On arrival, a small contingent of Monagasque guards presented a Guard of Honor. What a fantastic honour to be felt. Thereafter, Chief of Protocol led us (Nepal, Honduras and Burkina Faso Ambassadors) to the main hall where high Palace authorities welcomed us.

After sometime, HSH Prince Albert II came to the ceremony room. I was the first to be called and to present LOC. I knew HSH Prince holds a very good affection towards our country and people. After a very short ceremony, Prince invited me to another room for chats. It was a most joyous and honorable moment in my life that I was talking with the Sovereign Prince of the billionaires haven. I seized the opportunity to inform him about the prevailing political and economic situation of the country. In particular, I briefed Prince about the congenial situation for Foreign Direct Investment. He replied that if good and viable projects are introduced, he would give words to Monagasque investors to go to Nepal for investment purposes. What a grandeur way of thinking welfare of our country at such highest level.

Prince earlier visited Nepal in November 2011 in his own plane. He went to Rigaon in Dhading district to inaugurate the school building which was built by his personal donation.

Prince told me that the natural smiles of the children in that winter day was most pleasant and memorable. He further said that Nepalese people are honest and hold pure hearts. What a honour from the mouth of such a famous Sovereign Prince.

## **Portugal**

Our Embassy was informed that on 2nd May 2012, a function for the presentation of the credential will be held in Lisbon. I wrote to the Foreign Ministry seeking permission. It did not come even at the last minute. It was an unadorable delay on the part of the Foreign Ministry than my expectation.

However, I and my wife reached Lisbon in time and stayed at Landmark Hotel. On the morning of 2nd May, I was fully prepared in national attire to proceed to the Presidential Palace. Lady protocol officer also arrived in time and we were just gossiping as time was left. Then, a question came as a bombshell. She asked Excellency, where is your car? I said, of which car you are talking about. She said you should arrange your own car to go to the Presidential Palace. I said, it is normal practice that Host Government provides such a car for the ceremony. She replied, we have no practice like that here. Protocol department did not inform me in briefing, neither I visualized such a situation as I have had arranged cars for so many Ambassadors while working as Chief of Protocol.

A small commotion ensued. Luckily, Lisbon based social worker and businessman Makar Bahadur Hamal had a BMW car and who was standing close to me. He offered his services and assistance at that perilous moment and drove safely to the Presidential Palace in due time. I heaved a sigh of relief. Presentation of the credential ceremony went smoothly. President Anibal Silva de Calvo, an eminent economist showed great interest in Nepal and wished to visit our country someday.

## **Spain**

Myself and many other Ambassadors accredited to Spain had already passed 3 years and were running in the fourth year. We were appointed non-resident Ambassador to Spain. Among my close colleague was Ambassador Khouanta Phalivong of Lao DPR also. We often used to meet and talk and one topic, indeed, was the pending credential presentation ceremony in Spain.

In the early January 2014, we got a Note Verbal from Spanish Embassy indicating that a ceremony has been arranged for the presentation of the credential for the non-residential Ambassadors on 5 January 2014. It was a big and good news, indeed, for us who were facing jittery moments.

I flew to Madrid for the ceremony. There were altogether 15 Non-resident Ambassadors including Singaporean Ambassador Barry Desker who was based in Singapore itself. But, he came to present his Letter of Credential to King Juan Carlos II. This type of appointment and ensuing actions were unheard of.

On the appointed day, I went to the Zarazuela Palace in Madrid about 45 minutes drive from my hotel. Palace had a sprawling complex, however, due to winter cold, trees seemed without any leaves. Deers were wandering here and there. Security was quite tight. Only after a thorough checking, Ambassadors were allowed to the Palace complex. Upon arrival at the Palace building, Chief of Protocol received us Ambassadors one by one and after sometime, we were led to the main ceremony hall.

King Juan Carlos II was sitting in a chair and he was flanked by Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Garcia-Margallo, a veteran politician and other high ranking palace officials. King was so sober and decent. He expressed his regret for over delay for the ceremony which was caused by his illness. King expressed Spain's desire and readiness to work for the world peace. He harked on the promotion of friendship among nations.

Ambassadors were seated one by one in a semi-circle order and it was in seniority basis. Hardly there were 6 to 7 meters between King and Ambassadors. It was looked like a class room and the ambience was so great and relaxing. Chief of Protocol called on Ambassadors to present their credentials one by one.

Following the instruction, I got up and presented my Letter of Credence to standing King. We exchanged pleasantries. King so kindly reminisced their visit to Nepal in 1987 and said in front of all, Nepal is a beautiful country. I felt pride to hear such wonderful words from the mouth of none other than Spanish monarch. Ceremony was so simple, well arranged and short. All Ambassadors spoke highly of the acumen of Spanish authorities in arranging and hosting such a wonderful credential presentation ceremony.

Earlier prior to the Credential presentation ceremony, Foreign Minister Garcia-Magallo hosted a reception in honor of visiting foreign Non-resident Ambassadors. When I met him, I presented to him a booklet on Nepal in Spanish language. He said to me, "Ambassador, you brought only booklet for me, not invitation to visit your beautiful country." Embarrassed to hear such comments, yet I recouped and replied "Yes, Your Excellency Foreign Minister, just tell me when you can visit, I will bring invitation for you from my country." He laughed. I too was impressed by his sense of humour.

## **Vienna Conventions**

Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 and on Consular Relations of 1964 - Every diplomat must read Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961 and another one on Consular Relations of 1964. These two conventions serve as the foundation for the conduct of international diplomacy. Duties and responsibilities of the Host Governments, of diplomats, services and privileges they are supposed to get during the stationing in the host countries are all given in detail. In the capital cities of every country, there is a diplomatic corps. Washington DC has the largest diplomatic corps. Other big cities like Paris, Tokyo, and Moscow also have large diplomatic corps. Smallest diplomatic corps in the world is found in Monte Carlo, capital of Monaco with just two embassies i.e. France and Italy.

In every capital city, diplomatic corps are led by a Dean selected on the basis of seniority. However, in certain cities like Paris and others, the Papal Nunciature of Holy See serves as permanent Dean of the Diplomatic Corps. Diplomats must act according to the protocol and decency. Diplomats must obey the rules and regulations of the Host country. If a diplomat violates the rules of the Host country, he/she can be expelled from that country even within a short notice declaring him/her a *Persona Non Grata* (meaning unacceptable diplomat). Normally, any Ambassador in any country, after presentation of the credential, pays courtesy calls on high state dignitaries. Similarly, he/she pays courtesy call on Dean of the diplomatic corps and other Ambassadors as per convenience. In large capital cities, it is not possible to make calls on to every Ambassador.

Foreign diplomatic missions can deal with the Host government only through the Foreign Ministry. This is an universal practice. I realized it in all countries I served in Bangkok, Tokyo, Abu Dhabi and Paris. In one incident, while in Bangkok, we sent a letter to the Thai Commerce Ministry, but they returned saying that it must come through the Foreign Ministry. But in our country, freedom to diplomats seems much more. One incident in the past mentioned that one foreign Ambassador met the Chief Minister of one Pradesh got serious attention. Normally, whatever be the political system of the Government, foreign affairs issues are being dealt by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Foreign Ambassadors and diplomats must work being in close cooperation with MoFA, while dealing with Nepali state dignitaries. In old days also, one Officer from the Foreign Ministry must be present at the meeting between Ambassadors or other foreign delegates with our Nepali high dignitaries. Now-a-days, this practice seems to have lost its steam. Such a scenario deprives the state to lose opportunity to keep the minutes of the talks in the institutional memory.

In international diplomacy also, at times, problems crop up. Most infamous case of the violation of Vienna Convention is the seizure of American diplomats in Tehran on 4 November 1979 and held captive for 442 days. Mr. Eric Lange, Dean of the

Diplomatic Corps and Swiss Ambassador, appealed for their release citing Vienna Convention but to no avail. Ultimately they were release on 20 January 1980 after protracted negotiation. A foreign Minister of our neighboring country had to resign when his under garments were sent by diplomatic bag after his return from London. Diplomatic bags are used only for official communication and its sanctity cannot be violated by anyone.

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## Bilateral Friendship and Cooperation: Revisiting Nepal-Bangladesh Relations



- Prof. Dr. Mohan P. Lohani<sup>1</sup>

The significance of bilateral friendship and cooperation between Nepal and Bangladesh needs no overemphasis. Bilateral relations between these two South Asian neighbors are characterized by amity and goodwill, equality and harmony, mutual support and cooperation. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in April 1972. Nepal, which had recognized Bangladesh as an independent country, accepted it as ‘an indisputable political reality’ in a statement issued on January 16, 1972. Bilateral relations have ever since remained close, cordial, friendly, cooperative and problem free. Bangladesh has continued to appreciate Nepal’s support, both moral and material, during the liberation war of the early 70s. Nepal was overwhelmed when Bangladesh, a coastal country, co-sponsored a resolution tabled by land-locked countries, including Nepal seeking freedom of access to and from the sea in the UN’s economic committee in the mid-seventies of the last century when this writer was Nepal’s deputy permanent representative to the UN during the period. Nepal has, however, not been able to fully utilize the port facilities provided by Bangladesh.

Likewise, at the time of a special session on economic matters convened by the UN in 1980, Nepal and Bangladesh closely worked together to champion the cause of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). I recall with appreciation the active role played by Ambassador Abul Ahsan, former foreign secretary of Bangladesh and former first SAARC secretary-general in 1987 after the SAARC secretariat was hosted by Nepal the same year. Both Nepal and Bangladesh are keen to revitalize and reactivate this regional organization which has completed in December this year 36 years of its existence. It is sad to note that SAARC has remained hostage to prolonged bilateral tensions between India and Pakistan, the two influential members of the region. SAARC, it may be recalled, which was launched in Dhaka in 1985, was the outcome of a pioneering role played by Bangladesh, which was fully supported by other South Asian countries like Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka.

Nepal and Bangladesh have worked together, in the spirit of close partnership, in regional and sub-regional forums like SAARC, BIMSTEC and BBIN as well as other multilateral forums like the UN in resolving issues of regional and global concern, such as international terrorism, poverty alleviation, food crisis, environmental degradation and climate change. It is, however, distressing to note that SAARC has remained in a state of limbo since Nepal hosted the 18th Summit in 2014. A major agreement

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<sup>1</sup> Former Ambassador of Nepal to Bangladesh (1987-1991)

of this Summit was South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation (Electricity). Bangladesh has shown interest in promoting cooperation in the energy sector and has already expressed its readiness for power trade.

Needless to point out, there is tremendous scope for cooperation between Nepal and Bangladesh in areas ranging from connectivity in roads, railways, airways and waterways to trade, tourism, education, culture and hydropower generation. Trade deficit is a matter of concern for both countries, although the balance of trade is currently in favor of Bangladesh. If zero tariff is agreed upon, Nepali goods can find access to Bangladeshi market. Garment is a thriving industry in Bangladesh which enjoys comparative advantage in this sector. Nepal is in a position to export yarn in abundance. It is reported that at the recently held bilateral trade talks which covered a comprehensive agenda of 23 items, such as power trade, visa facilitation for Nepali students, cargo carrying vehicles, use of Bangladesh ports and, last but not the least, export of yarn from Nepal, priority was given to yarn export but no progress has been made.

Nepal has already invited Bangladeshi investors to invest in energy projects in order to facilitate the power trade and supply of Nepal's electricity to Bangladesh to meet its growing energy requirements. The leaders of both countries have stressed the importance and necessity of developing mutually beneficial economic partnership. President Mohammed Abdul Hamid of Bangladesh and President Bidya Devi Bhandari of Nepal have exchanged high level visits in recent years and have discussed a variety of issues of mutual concern and interest such as infrastructure building at border entry points, using ports in Bangladesh, trade promotion, tourism development and energy cooperation. President Hamid was apprised of Visit Nepal Year (VNY) 2020 which was expected to attract 2 million tourists from different parts of the world, including Bangladesh. Unfortunately, the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic since January 2020 has hit hard the economies of all countries, including the economies of both Nepal and Bangladesh. Prof. Shahab Enam Khan who is a visiting fellow at Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement ( NIICE) has tersely stated: 'What Bangladesh needs is economic growth.' This is also the priority of Nepal. Both countries should work together and pool their resources to achieve the cherished goal of economic growth in order to raise the living standards of the people. Both need cooperation and assistance from friendly neighbors like China and India to ensure sustainable development, capacity building and growth of a skilled society through technology transfer. Prof. Enam has rightly observed that the creation of trade triangle between Nepal and Bangladesh, China and India would go a long way in stabilizing the post-Covid-19 regional growth. Nepal and Bangladesh have already signed a MoU with China on Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), although India has not yet welcomed and supported it. India is, however, like Nepal and Bangladesh, a member of Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB). Nepal and Bangladesh believe

in maintaining best of relations with its immediate neighbors as well as other friendly countries like the US, UK, EU, Japan, Australia and South Korea.

Cooperation between Nepal and Bangladesh in the education sector is a highly commendable feature of bilateral relations. A large number of Nepali students have gone to Bangladesh to pursue higher studies in technical subjects like medicine, engineering and agriculture. During my ambassadorial tenure in Dhaka from 1987 to 1991, one of the functions of our embassy was to help these students, now numbering more than 4 thousand, get admitted to their respective universities without hassles and with full cooperation and goodwill from the government of Bangladesh. It is in the interest of both Nepal and Bangladesh to ensure that the quality of education is maintained in accordance with internationally accepted standards so that both our countries benefit from their professional skills, competence and expertise.

It has been nearly 50 years since Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign independent country. Despite the tragedy suffered by this country from the brutal assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, popularly known as the Bangbandhu (Father of the Nation), Bangladesh has made, over the years, tremendous progress in accelerating the pace of socio-economic development, including reducing poverty and improving social sectors like health, education and employment. Both Nepal and Bangladesh, as per a report recently adopted by the UN, look forward to graduating from LDC status, preferably by 2026. As close neighbors, separated by a distance of 30 kms only, Nepal and Bangladesh can march ahead, hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, on the road to peace, prosperity and stability through mutual cooperation and commitment to a common cause such as regional and global peace and stability.

Talking about Nepal-Bangladesh relations and the need for giving it a new thrust, it will be pertinent to share the views of some diplomats and scholars of Bangladesh. Last year, in 2020, on October 1, a webinar was jointly organized by Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement (NIICE) and Center for Diplomacy and Development (CDD) on 'Bangladesh-Nepal Bilateral Cooperation in the Contemporary Regional Security Architecture.' Farooq Shoban, former foreign secretary and a career diplomat of Bangladesh, referred to common aspirations of Nepal and Bangladesh and their commitment to regional (SAARC and BIMSTEC) and sub-regional (BBIN) cooperation. Commenting on recent developments in Sino-Indian relations and its impact on the geo-politics of the region, he stressed the need for further strengthening and deepening cooperation between Nepal and Bangladesh in all areas of mutual concern. He expressed concern over the ongoing Sino-Indian rift over the boundary. South Asia was likely to face second Cold War because of growing Sino-American rivalry and differences. While India tilted more towards the US, Pakistan-China alliance was more explicit. To avoid the region becoming a battleground for foreign powers that might adversely impact common aspirations, Mr. Shoban stressed the importance of regional cooperation for peace and stability. He believed Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) led by the US was

designed to contain China, while the latter's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aimed at enhancing Chinese influence globally. China has financially assisted Pakistan to modernize its Gwadar port under China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Both India and Pakistan being nuclear weapons states, other non-nuclear smaller countries of South Asia have expressed their support for the declaration of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace. These countries have shown maximum interest in the policy dialogue on non-traditional security, such as human security as well as food and water security.

Mr. Humayun Kabir, Chairman, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) and former ambassador to Nepal, expressed concern over overt militarization of South Asia, putting diplomacy on the back burner. He regretted that South Asia, from diplomatic point of view, was not making forward movement nor was the situation congenial for regional security architecture under SAARC. It is, therefore, imperative for Nepal and Bangladesh to further explore areas of mutual cooperation. He welcomed the end of decade-long Maoist insurgency in Nepal and lauded the latter's phenomenal role in managing transition. Emphasizing the need for building up closer relationship based on an element of mutuality, Mr. Kabir stated that both Nepal and Bangladesh share some degree of nervousness about India as a big neighbor. Hence the need for reinforcing bilateral relationship. On economic cooperation, Mr. Kabir described Bangladesh as a consumer of huge agricultural exports from Nepal. As Bangladesh imports vegetables from India, the same could be imported from Nepal. Agricultural goods from Nepal and industrial (manufactured) products from Bangladesh could complement each other. The common aspiration of both Nepal and Bangladesh is to live in peace without global ambition. Economic cooperation is the central element in bilateral relations. In this respect, Bangladesh had offered long ago Chittagong and Mongla ports as alternative to India's Calcutta port. However, Mr. Kabir did not minimize the importance and necessity of trilateral cooperation between Nepal, India and Bangladesh. Mr. Kabir dwelt at some length on huge and better opportunities in Bangladesh for self-financing young Nepali students who were satisfied with the quality of education in various Bangladeshi institutions of higher learning. Such students could serve in future as goodwill ambassadors between Nepal and Bangladesh. Finally, he referred to the influx of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. While his country was trying to help them to go back in safety, he sought Nepal's cooperation in the UN for repatriation of these refugees who were not terrorists as described by the Myanmar army.

The lady ambassador to Nepal from Bangladesh Mashfi Binte Shams who returned home last year after completing her diplomatic assignment, perhaps the longest, of seven years and a half, expressed the view that there was a lot of scope for meaningful bilateral cooperation. Describing Nepal and Bangladesh as inheritors of ancient civilization and culture, she stated that both Nepal and Bangladesh valued political stability as being essential to progress and development. She hoped that the constitution of 2015 would ensure some stability in Nepal which was going

through political transition after the comprehensive peace accord was signed in 2006. Welcoming Nepal's lentil export to Bangladesh, she described the road connectivity linking Nepal's Kakarvitta to Banglabandh via Fulbari of India as a positive and landmark event. She also touched on various areas of cooperation such as tourism, agriculture and the power sector. She was confident that the high level visits such as the state visit of President Bidya Devi Bhandari of Nepal to Bangladesh and the four-day official visit reciprocated by President Mohammed Abdul Hamid of Bangladesh to Nepal in November 2019 had significantly contributed to further strengthening bilateral relations.

The fourth speaker ambassador designate of Bangladesh to Nepal Mr. Salahuddin Noman Chowdhary found Nepal and Bangladesh in a similar situation facing common challenges. He, too, like the previous speakers held the view that there is tremendous scope for cooperation and development between Nepal and Bangladesh in such areas as promotion of trade, investment and tourism. Enabling arrangements for removing non-tariff barriers would significantly facilitate trade promotion between the two countries. He also emphasized the importance of cooperation in the energy sector as Bangladesh was willing to buy electricity from Nepal. The next priority sector for him was cooperation in the education sector which would facilitate the pursuit of higher studies by Nepali students in Bangladesh. Apart from tourism, another area of cooperation was investment in pharmaceuticals. Mr. Chowdhary assured the Nepali participants that he would spare no pains to strengthen and promote cooperation between the two countries during his tenure of office. It may be noted that Mr. Chowdhary has already presented his credentials and assumed his duties as ambassador to Nepal.

Dr. Dinesh Bhattarai, former ambassador and former foreign policy adviser to late PM Sushil Koirala, representing Nepali participants described Nepal-Bangladesh relations as close and cordial based on goodwill, mutual trust and mutual understanding. He pointed out that the periodic exchange of high level visits from both sides had considerably enriched and deepened bilateral relations. No less important were people-to-people contacts at various levels such as arts, culture, the academia and the media. He was pleased to note that Nepal and Bangladesh have worked together and shared identical views on matters of regional and global concern in regional and multilateral forums. Stable political situation prevailing in both countries was a matter of great satisfaction. On the importance of trilateral process in the sub-region Dr. Bhattarai suggested that Nepal, Bangladesh and India could collaborate in such vital areas as water management and mitigation of floods. He was of the view that connectivity of mind would lead to physical connectivity.

Dr. Bhattarai further opined that South Asia inhabited by 1.9 billion people is the fastest growing economy in the region. South Asia due to its geo-strategic location is rich in natural resources and human capital. There are huge possibilities of investment but barriers to investment need to be reduced. He deplored the fact that SAARC,

launched more than 3 decades ago with a great deal of euphoria and promise, has been completely sidelined. Regional integration could no longer be postponed. It was encouraging to note that PM Modi of India called for tangible cooperation to combat Covid-19 pandemic in the SAARC region at a webinar convened by him last year and attended by all SAARC member states. Covid-19 has exposed vulnerability of the unvaccinated population, in particular the elderly population, in the region. Dr. Bhattarai stated that human security is the key to progress in the region which is faced with formidable challenges like poverty eradication. He also described cross-border terrorism as the culprit threatening regional peace, stability and security. He supported Ambassador Farooq Shoban's argument that South Asia is at the risk of second Cold War due to great power rivalry. According to the veteran diplomat, politics has overtaken diplomacy. The redeeming feature, however, is the democratization of South Asia. Future appears to be on the side of South Asia in the emerging global order. On the issue of Rohingya refugees, Nepal, as Dr. Bhattarai categorically stated, which had to cope with more than one hundred thousand Bhutanese refugees in the 90s, would support the repatriation of displaced people as refugees in full dignity and honor.

The organizers, winding up the webinar, concluded on a positive note describing the discussion and interaction as very frank, friendly and fruitful. Nepal-Bangladesh relations were multi-dimensional and as such, there were enormous possibilities of cooperation ranging from trade, tourism and investment to health, education and security cooperation.

Relations, however, cannot be taken for granted. As international relations have witnessed paradigm shift in recent years, reshaping Nepal-Bangladesh relations in the changed context of rapidly evolving global order calls for foresight and vision among political leaders of both countries, diplomatic acumen, mature understanding of each other's sensitivities and aspirations, and pragmatic response to challenges and opportunities.

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## Revitalizing the United Nations<sup>1</sup>



-Dr. Narayan Khadka

I would like to join world leaders in expressing our deepest condolences to the people across the world, who have lost their loved ones due to the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has silently and cruelly claimed over 4.5 million lives. The crisis has brought the world to a grinding halt, devastated the global economy, pushed an additional 150 million people into extreme poverty, and threatened to reverse hard-earned development gains. The covid crisis has exacerbated pre-existing and perennial challenges such as poverty, hunger, unemployment, inequalities, and climate change. This has exposed systemic weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and inadequacies in health systems around the world. Nowhere is this distinctly visible than in the most weak and vulnerable countries where people remain deprived of access to even basic civic amenities.

The theme of the General Debate ‘building resilience through hope’ is both timely and pertinent. Recovering from COVID 19, rebuilding sustainably, responding to the needs of the planet, respecting the rights of people, and revitalizing the United Nations aptly mirrors the pressing priorities, challenges, and needs.

Reviving hope is critical in times of crisis. We appreciate the efforts made by the international community including the United Nations system to address the challenges posed by COVID-19. We also welcome the pledges of funds and vaccines. Increased commitment and resources are needed for these initiatives. Deepening vaccine inequality is leaving adverse socio-economic impacts in many low-income countries. Fair and equitable access to vaccines must be ensured for everyone, everywhere. People’s lives should come first. Vaccines must be declared as public goods for the benefit of people’s lives.

In Nepal, saving lives, strengthening the health system, and pursuing economic recovery and transformation underpin our efforts to build a sustainable and resilient recovery. Despite constraints and challenges to access COVID-19 vaccines, we have been able to vaccinate close to 20 percent of our population. We remain grateful to our immediate neighbours-India and China for their support in fighting the covid crisis.

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*1 Excerpt from the statement delivered by Hon. Minister for Foreign Affairs and Leader of Nepali Delegation at the General Debate of the 76th Session of UN General Assembly, New York, 27 September 2021 on the theme: Building resilience through hope-to recover from COVID 19, rebuild sustainably, respond to the needs of the planet, respect the rights of people, revitalize the United Nations*

We also sincerely thank friendly countries, like the United States, Britain, Japan and others for providing vaccines, critical medical equipment, and medicines in our fight against the pandemic.

Recent developments in Afghanistan are of common concern to all of us. People of Afghanistan deserve better. We call for an unhindered humanitarian access and full resumption of public services, including health and education for all sections of Afghan society. We urge all parties involved to ensure peace, security, and stability so that the Afghan people can live in dignity and enjoy their fundamental rights and freedom. We also urge Afghanistan to engage with the international community on the basis of the principles of the UN Charter and norms of international law.

We call on all concerned parties in Myanmar to respect the will of the people, restore the democratic and constitutional process, and uphold the fundamental rights and freedom of the Myanmar's people.

We call for an immediate end to the hardships and sufferings of the common people in Libya, Syria, and Yemen.

In the Middle East, we reiterate our long-standing position and want to see peace and security with a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine living side by side within secure and recognized international borders.

For over 63 years, Nepal has consistently contributed to the UN peace operations to promote peace, security, and stability in the conflict-ridden parts of the world. We attach high importance to the safety and security of UN peacekeepers and the need for adequate training, resources, and modern technologies. It is in this spirit that we endorsed the Declaration of Shared Commitments in support of the 'Action for Peacekeeping' initiative. Nepal has endorsed the Kigali Principles on the protection of civilians and supports the UN Secretary General's system-wide zero-tolerance policy for sexual exploitation and abuse and aims for zero case scenario in peacekeeping. As one of the largest troop and police contributing countries, Nepal believes that such countries deserve more senior level positions both at the headquarters and in the field based on the level of their contributions.

Nepal condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and denounces all activities aimed to fuel social discord, communal conflicts, and intolerance. There is a need of robust global cooperation to effectively implement the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, to combat and control financing of terrorism, and to fight the organized trans-border crimes. This underlines the urgency for conclusion of a comprehensive convention against terrorism.

It is worrisome to see new signs of arms race through modernization of nuclear arms, and weaponization of outer space among big powers. We call upon them to divert precious resources from military spending to addressing the covid-19 pandemic and lifting the most vulnerable people out of poverty. The mechanisms of disarmament as well as the measures of non-proliferation and confidence building have been stalled. Nepal calls for general and complete disarmament of all weapons of mass destruction in a time-bound and verifiable manner. As the host to the UN Regional Center for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific, we are committed to supporting the works of the Centre and reviving the Kathmandu Process for promoting regional efforts on disarmament, arms control, and non-proliferation.

Whether it is the rising of sea levels or melting of Himalayan glaciers, hurricanes, storms, floods or fires, climate change has become an existential threat to humanity. Reports indicate that warmer conditions have even prompted animals and plants to adopt new habits and evolve new traits. Nepal is home to eight of the world's 14 highest peaks including the top of the world- Sagarmatha, the Mount Everest. Sagarmatha stands as an icon of adventure seekers and Himalayan heritage for us. As environmental concerns are growing, we need to raise environmental awareness. While we welcome climbers from around the world, we expect climbers' cooperation to bring back the garbage from the high mountains to maintain their sanctity.

Nepal has a number of snow-fed Himalayan rivers that are connected to identity and civilizations and sustain one fifth of the global population. Our efforts have been to accord due ecological diligence while undertaking development activities in the Himalayan region. Nepal is at the sharp end of climate change despite its negligible share in greenhouse gas emissions. On our part, we reiterate our commitment to delivering climate-resilient development pathways by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2050. The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, equity and respective capabilities should be at the center of the climate agenda to ensure climate justice.

The Glasgow COP26 must provide a breakthrough. Climate ambition of developing countries must be met with easier access to adequate financial and technological support for adaptation and mitigation. It must be a gateway to greener, cleaner, and smarter energy transition.

With just less than a decade left, the world is not on track to achieve the 2030 Agenda. The pandemic has strained our efforts to realize the SDGs. As we strive for resilient recovery and building back better and stronger, achieving SDGs should be at the center of our priorities. Nepal has mainstreamed the SDGs into its national plans, policies, and programmes. Significant progress has been achieved across major sectors, such as education, health, gender equality and women's empowerment. Changing the lives of people lacking wealth, dignity, and human rights has been our commitment.

The Least developed countries (LDCs) are the most vulnerable group of countries even at the first quarter of the 21st century. They should be freed from the dehumanizing conditions of poverty and under development. LDCs and LLDCs need reliable and sustainable financing, partnerships, and technology transfer to overcome their structural impediments to benefit from globalization.

As both an LDC and LLDC, Nepal's structural challenges are unique. We see our plan to graduate from the LDC category by 2026 as an opportunity to bring structural transformation and make the long-held national aspiration of graduation smooth, sustainable, and irreversible. We look up to the LDC-5 to be held in Doha early next year as an important opportunity to renew the bond of international partnership. It must build on the unfinished business of IPOA, with a commitment to enhanced levels of support to the graduating countries.

The development of multi-modal transport infrastructure and unhindered transit rights of landlocked nations are critical to their sustainable development. We call for the implementation of past decisions and programmes in full synergy and coherence with the 2030 Agenda and expect development partners to increase their support to establish a secure, reliable, and efficient transit transport system for the landlocked developing countries. The ongoing crisis must not be a pretext for retracting from ODA commitments.

The development potentials of South-South cooperation in terms of trade, investment and technology must be fully exploited. It is time to reform global economic governance architecture to ensure fair and equitable representation of all. We welcome the steps taken by the IMF and G20 on debt relief and debt service suspension. Nepal calls for a reformed and more equitable international debt restructuring to address the debt crisis of low-income countries.

WTO is not only about maintaining rules-based international trading order, it must also be a platform to enable the developing countries to benefit from it with an enhanced level of international cooperation in the areas of aid for trade, technology transfer, and capacity building.

Connectivity is a lifeline for peace, progress, and prosperity. Connectivity forms a premise for enduring cooperation, deeper integration, building of trust and confidence among nations. Nepal attaches utmost priority to cooperation through connectivity and underlines the need to create a win-win situation between and among countries.

Nepal calls for concerted efforts to ensure the safety, security, dignity, and well-being of all migrant workers. We call for the effective implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and underline the need for a more robust international governance for the protection, safety, and welfare of the migrant workers.

Protection of minorities and their rights makes the world more humane and contributes to world peace and security. Despite not being a party to the Refugee Convention and its Protocol, Nepal has hosted thousands of refugees on humanitarian principles. Nepal considers the forced eviction of citizens as a grave crime against humanity. We call upon the international community to respond responsibly and act decisively for refugees' right to return to their homeland in safety and dignity.

Nepal has chosen the democratic path to development. Democracy is about people and therefore democracy is indispensable for people's welfare. The constitution of Nepal accommodates the aspirations of all its citizens. Proportional representation of all sections of the society is at its core. It guarantees a comprehensive set of internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms. The constitution establishes powerful commissions to promote and protect rights and interests specific to women, Dalits, Muslims, Madhesis, indigenous people and other disadvantaged communities. It makes it mandatory to have 33% women representation in federal and provincial parliaments and 40% at the local level. This has firmed up their role in politics and development.

We are committed to conclude the transitional justice process through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons. There would be no blanket amnesty in the cases of serious violation of human rights. As a member elected for the second term in the UN Human Rights Council, we continue to add value through apolitical and impartial approach to human rights.

Nepal's worldview is shaped by our adherence to the principle of 'amity with all and enmity with none'. Our friendship with both of our neighbors, India and China, remains of paramount importance in the conduct of our foreign policy based on the principles of Panchsheel – five principles of peaceful co-existence, derived from the teachings of Lord Buddha, the enlightened son of Nepal. The relevance of these principles as a framework for interstate relations cannot be overstated in the present context. Principles and purposes of the UN Charter, non-alignment, international law and norms of world peace form the basis of our foreign policy.

The present government of Nepal led by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba is committed to conduct the foreign policy on the basis of sovereign equality, mutual respect, and mutual benefit and remains engaged with all friendly countries in the wider international community.

Nepal firmly believes in the indispensability of multilateralism with the United Nations as its centre. We consider this the only way to build global understanding and cooperation, promote shared interests, and secure our common future. We add our voices in support of the measures and initiatives aimed at UN reforms. Under-

representation of developing countries must be addressed in recognition of their growing contributions. We want to see a more representative, inclusive, and transparent Security Council and a more revitalized General Assembly. Reforms must be inclusive and representative, accountable, and effective in its delivery.

We consider regional cooperation arrangements important for building trust and confidence among nations, managing harmonious relations and making the best use of complementarities for shared prosperity. Nepal's active engagement in SAARC, BIMSTEC and ACD manifests our ardent faith in regional cooperation, connectivity, and integration.

Over the last sixty-five years, Nepal and the United Nations have enjoyed a strong partnership- driven by trust, cooperation, and mutual respect. We thank the United Nations for its continued support in our development endeavors.

Nepal commends the Secretary-General for bringing out a comprehensive report 'Our Common Agenda'. We support the report's focus on the agenda of action designed to accelerate the implementation of existing commitments.

We live in troubled times. There has been a dramatic shift in geo-politics and geo-economics in the post-Cold War era posing unprecedented challenges on all fronts. The world's economic center of gravity is shifting decisively towards Asia, centered on the economic growth of China and India. At the same time, the world is becoming more complicated and polarized, with transnational challenges ranging from terrorism to climate change to food security to mass migration to political radicalism and extremism.

Under the cumulative impact of all these factors, we are experiencing new ways of life in the midst of confusion and uncertainty. We see conflicts in different parts of the world, these conflicts are more within nations than between nations. This has given rise to identity politics. Nations find themselves increasingly divided along lines of race, ethnicity, gender and religion. We must find a common ground and practice tolerance and harmony to confront these unimaginable problems. My delegation considers that democracy and multilateralism have no alternative to overcome the stresses and strains of the day. It is also the best antidote to the risk of civil conflict in ethnically diverse societies.

I feel happy to share with this august audience that unity in vast diversity is Nepal's national strength. Thanks to the democratic culture and harmonious way of life, Nepali people's resilience in times of hardships and sufferings has remained exemplary as seen in the aftermath of the devastating earthquakes of 2015, and the COVID-19 pandemic in recent times.

As I stand here today, my thoughts go back to 1960, when the first elected Prime Minister of Nepal, late B.P. Koirala, while addressing the UN General Assembly, said, and I quote, “As we look at the world, we find that it is the economic disparity between countries, as between the rich and the poor people within the nation, that is the source of much friction and tension. . . . .The main function of the United Nations at the present moment is the creation or recreation of a climate of confidence and trust.”

Creating a climate of confidence and trust is as relevant today as it was in 1960. It is upon us to work together for a more equitable, just, fair, resilient, and sustainable world. In conclusion, I believe the time is now to turn the crisis into opportunity, despair into hope, and risk into resilience. The time is now to build a stronger, interconnected, and inclusive multilateral system grounded in cooperation, solidarity and mutual trust. We must rise to our responsibility to rebuild for the sake of the people we serve and the planet we live in.

*(Courtesy: [www.mofa.gov.np](http://www.mofa.gov.np))*

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# US-China Relations in the Changing Global Context



- Paras Ghimire<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The International system - as designed, following the World War - II will almost disappear by 2040 on account of the rise of emerging powers, a globalising economy, an historic transfer of relative wealth and economic heft, from the West to East, the growing influence of non-state actors and above all by the unprecedented rise of China and subsequently its global footprints in every domain. By 2040, the international system will be a global multipolar one with gaps in national power continuing to edge closer between the rich world and developing nations. Although the remaining sole superpower, the United States is likely to continue as pre-eminent powerful actor, its relative strength - even in the military realm will decline and US leverage will become more constrained. Conversely, China is poised to have more impact across the world, two decades hence than any other country. If current trends are any guide, by 2050, China will be the largest economy both in GDP terms as well as in dollar market exchange numbers.

US-China relationship has been complex since the end of the second world war. The economic ties grew rapidly following the then strongman Deng Xiaoping's landmark market economy reform efforts. The relationship is one of close economic bonds as also hegemonic rivalry in the Asia-Pacific described by global leaders as the world's most important bilateral relationship of the 21st century.

Historically, relations between the two countries have generally been stable with some notable waxing and waning-punctuated with a smattering of open conflict during the Korean war and the Vietnam war.

Currently, America and China have mutual political, economic and security interests such as non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, cyber crimes, Huawei technology trade black list, climate change and close cooperation as seen in the recent Glasgow climate summit. At the same time, there are unresolved concerns pertaining to the role of democracy in government and human rights issues in China. The two countries remain in dispute over territorial issues in the South China Sea. China claims sovereignty over virtually the entire South China Sea, while the United states sees it as international

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<sup>1</sup> Former Ambassador of Nepal to Myanmar (2012-2016)

waters and therefore free and open and claims the right for its warships and aircraft to conduct operations in the area.

It is noteworthy that since US President Richard Nixon's historic visit to China in 1972, every US President barring Jimmy Carter, has toured China. Relations with China did come under strain following President Barrack Obama's Asia Pivot strategy. Notwithstanding tensions during his term, the Chinese population's favourability of the US stood at 52% in Obama's last year of 2016 only to decline during the Trump administration. A recent Pew Research Center survey posits 25% of Americans have a supportive view of China, with 75% expressing an unfavourable view, one of the most adverse perceptions of China. The poll also showed that 25% of Americans view China as the top threat to the US. Additionally, another survey of Chinese public opinions also found a corresponding diminishing favourability towards the US, with 62% venting an unfavourable view.

The relationship plunged steeply under the President Donald Trump with issues such as China's militarization of South China and Chinese espionage in the United States levelling up. The Trump administration labeled China a strategic competitor and launched a trade war against China, banned US companies from selling equipment to Huawei and other companies linked to human rights abuses in Xinjiang, ratcheted up visa restrictions on Chinese nationality students and scholars, designating China as a currency manipulator. During the entire administration and especially since the US-China trade war erupted, political observers warned that a new cold war likened to the "Thucydides trap" between the ruling or an established and the rising or the emerging power is "on the horizon". By the end of the last year, 2020 and even after, the relationship faced headwinds as both sides were recruiting allies to attack the other regarding guilt for this global Covid – 19 pandemic. Tensions in the US – China relations have far from abated during the current Biden administration which made China one of its focal points in implementing American foreign policy. The more aggressive and combative stance has prevailed with the Biden Administration training its guns on China's treatment of Hongkong, its threat against Taiwan, the "Uyghur genocide" and "Chinese Cyber warfare". As tit for tat, China has mounted "Wolf warrior diplomacy" to refute all accusations of human rights abuses. China was the biggest trading partner of the United States till the outbreak of the deadly Corona pandemic in December 2019, thereafter it dropped to the third place because of the ongoing trade war. On January 19, 2021, outgoing Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced China committing a genocide against the Uyghurs and crimes against humanity and the current Biden administration is continuing with the same assessment on the Uyghurs. Around the time of President Biden's inauguration, China unveiled sanction against Pompeo and several other former officials and a handful of immediate family members accusing them of fomenting troubles – planning, interfering and working against China's internal affairs, also restricting suspicious companies from doing business in China.

## **Influence in Asia**

The fact remains that China's unprecedented economic rise since 1979 and its sprawling global footprints have certainly raised eyebrows, triggering some geopolitical friction between the US and China in East Asia, not to speak of, in South East Asia as also in central Asia including Afghanistan, which has now emerged as a country of "strategic importance" seeking support and friendship and therefore snuggled up by China since its blitzkrieg takeover by Talibans in the mid August 2021 following a hasty retreat by America. It is quite conceivable that the US – China trade and investment ties remain robust and enduring doing everyday business transactions of US\$ 2 billion till the pandemic broke out at the end of 2019. Even last year, China was America's largest goods trading partner, third largest export market and largest source of imports. Exports to China supported an estimated 1.5 million jobs in the United States in 2019. China also is the largest source of international students in the United States. A record 4 hundred thousand Chinese students were in America in 2020 representing 35% of international students in colleges and universities. Of them, many of the top scorer Chinese students have chosen to stay in the US following graduation thus contributing to America's scientific, technological and economic development. It remains to be seen if this trend will continue.

## **Competitive Interdependence**

The dense cobwebs of relations formed by trade, finance, scientific and academic links between these two global powers – one ruling and the other rising will make it difficult for one side to inflict harm on the other at the expense of itself. President Joe Biden likely will use the challenges posed by China as a stimulus or motivation for his domestic resilience agenda. The Biden team is fully aware and is inclined to take proactive steps to realize progress on serious global challenges like climate change, pandemics and inclusive global economic recovery undergirded by pragmatic lead efforts working in lockstep even with "non-democratic states" cognizant as we are all living in a multipolar world. US-China overall relations, far from smooth-sailing in the foreseeable future are poised to be hard-nosed and fraught. Neither side is likely to buckle and offer concessions for smoother relations, hardening competition that pervades alongside a mutual awareness that both sides will be impacted for good or ill by their capacity to address common challenges. It is no secret that the Biden administration has called managing/navigating relationship with Beijing, the biggest geo-political test of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Sino-American relations are vitally important for Asia and the World**

It is no brainer that China and America are, by any yardstick, world's two richest and strongest countries and, therefore, have wide leverage and pull strings, wielding sizeable influence on all countries in opposing directions. Further, if they work in

tandem and get along well, Asia's future will be promising, which in turn will do a "world of good" to the global community and if they squabble, locked in conflict and behave badly, they will spell doom, bringing curse to Asia and the world in general, affecting adversely global peace and prosperity. As their trade and economies are closely interlinked, happy Sino-American relations will certainly be in the broader interests of the Asian population consisting far more than half of the global 8 billion planetary inhabitants. Does Asia deserve many more decades of peace and stability or will it be headed for conflict, disputes and confrontation ? The answers are not all clear-sighted now. Every thing largely and squarely depends on how Washington and Beijing responsibly make choices and rolls out policies to accommodate the other. Only by working together in the global high table including in multilateral institutions can they make accommodations needed to pave the way for creative cooperation and constructive future. Both have equal stakes and so share responsibility to work with each other and thereby contribute to maintaining equitable international order. There are now no two opinions that it does not take long for China to have a large economy than America and also that it is indisputable that by mid century, political scientists share the view that China's GDP could be almost double America's. As China grows rich, it becomes stronger and more powerful adding to its capability to invest more to its state-of-the-art technology, cutting-edge of knowledge and development and shore up its military prowess. This will then invariably tilt the global balance of power-shaping up permutations, configuration and combinations in nations across the world. China, once it gets a foothold with its global footprints and as it becomes rich and stronger, the calculations and algorithms would change thus allowing China to use its new-found power to veto decisions in global institutions including in the United Nations. This shift of power gradually from the West to the East is not necessarily by America's decline but is driven by China's unprecedented economic ascent and while all this happens, America has closed options but to tolerate or accept.

On closer examination, a wiser US-China statesmanship would be: mutual accommodation, meaning – America can remain in Asia on a shared basis, ceding China a larger role, at the same time, maintaining a stronger presence of its own, other than blocking China and preserve its status quo in Asia. It is again that at least over the next few decades both America and China would hardly be stronger enough to lead Asia in the way America has done post-Nixon's historic opening of China in 1972, in that each will work to deny the leadership to the other.

How China will work in future: It is now fairly obvious that China's economic growth is translating into growing strategic and military powers. A recent Pew survey has established that China would not be prepared for overall global leadership, expressing reluctance to lead the world responsibly befitting a great power and with no choice but to leave all this to America. This could be the questionable. For now, China shows little interest in asserting any meaningful leadership role beyond East Asian and Western

Pacific regions. There is no mistaking the possibility that China may not take the onus of safeguarding US – led liberal international order and that it will cosily use its power to nurse its own interests where it can. It is as well discernible that China may continue to settle for the status quo in Asia foreseeing any challenge could be contrary to its economic interests for, in a globalized world, economic interdependence makes it possible for US-China not to risk the consequences of strategic rivalry. For good measure, China's political leadership would do well to keep its economy growing to make the Chinese people happy and prosperous and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) sustainably in power position. Needless to mention, this requires a stable international environment and profitable and righteous relations with the United States. It can, therefore, be safely assumed that China may continue to accept American primacy as the viable way forward at least for now so as to maintain a stable global environment and keep even-handed relations with America. It can further be argued that China's political leadership has made clear more than once that it needs to work more peacefully till the next three decades to emerge as the stronger, indisputable super-power almost in all respects and that obviously requires international stability. While we posit that America will continue to remain a leading power for the next three decades, it can be argued on the flip side that China also wants to portray itself as the great power – out to gain traction reclaiming its place as a leader – in Asia and across the world. It needs no recitation that China and India were largest economies from AD1 to 1820 before Europe took off, followed by America. For the past two centuries, China has been deprived of that status by other great powers and it is but natural that China is in a bid to revert to its lost glory, its status and identity with its new-found wealth and power.

### **Interdependent World**

Since the beginning of the new millennium, relations between the World's major powers have largely been stable and peaceful, coinciding and co-existing with – unprecedented globalization and economic growth. As globalization is the precursor to peace and it is irreversible – except for the indefinite pandemic period – so peace subsequently down the line, between major powers can be assured at least for now. America and China today are interwoven and more interdependent economically than any two comparably powerful nations we can think of. This will certainly limit any vaulting ambition and untoward rivalry on both sides and will eventually create a conducive environment to live and work side by side even if willy willy amidst waxing and waning of their relations for the past decade stretching this far up to the current Biden Administration. It is an inescapable reality that the West has hitherto provided the motivations, driving economic growth and the Rest hitched their wagons to it. China's watershed economic growth especially over the past two decades is, in large part, triggered by exports to America. Now in contrast, the Rest is providing motivations and western nations are poised to deliver economic growth to their populations by

hitching their wagons to the Rest. As regards China's stupendous success over the past four decades since its spectacular economic ascent post historic 1979 Deng Xiaoping – led economic and market reforms preceded by Mao Ze Dong's rule to now "Xi Jinping thoughts" with iron-clad grip on power and overarching leadership. This all explains and which culminated in the extraordinary transformation of Chinese society: 800 million Chinese of the 1.4 billion populace have so far been rescued from the absolute poverty – a Herculean task in itself .

### **China's BRI stacked against America's IPS**

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) known as One Belt One Road or OBOR for short – is a global infrastructure development strategy adopted by the Chinese government in 2013 to invest in nearly 70 countries and international organizations. It is touted as a center-piece of the Chinese President Xi Jinping's foreign policy which calls for China to assume a greater leadership role for global affairs in consonance with its rising power and status. The project has a target completion date of 2049 coinciding with the centennial of the people's republic of China (PRC)'s founding. In response, the United States, Japan and Australia formed a counter initiative, Blue Dot network in 2019, followed by the G7' B3W 'Build Back Better World' initiative recently in 2021. While BRI is primarily a geo-economic initiative- dotted with many ongoing debates on its geo-economic and geo-strategic implications. Trump administration's Indo-Pacific strategy in mainly designed to deter and contain China and address the threat of the BRI. Together with Japan, India, Australia and other like-minded countries, the US would therefore plan and formulate investment standards and principles for the BRI infrastructure and use its own influence in international financial institutions as also other multilateral agencies to ameliorate the West's status in the global economy. The emergence of Indo-Pacific as geo-strategic concept is a response to China's rapid rise from major power such as the United States, Japan and India. As against China's accelerated and ground-breaking ascent to wealth and power, the US is more than most trying to re-integrate order and unite allies and partner countries to implement a unified strategy and thereby make its presence conspicuously felt in the wider world.

The Obama administration's rebalance to Asia Pacific policy also known as Pivot Asia was in fact an Indo-Pacific strategy containing three distinct pillars : a) military and security b) economy and trade popularly called Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) as well as c) value and diplomacy. Parallel to the Obama administration's policy, the Trump administration's indo-pacific strategy hinges and focuses more on military and security realm.

Be that as it may, whether it is BRI enunciated by China as a global infrastructure development project and Indo-Pacific Strategy floated by the United States as a counter- vailing measure-over the long haul, China and the United States need to work in tandem, side by side, on areas where their interests converge, keen on negotiating

and opening multiple channels in areas where their interests collide and diverge with a view, eventually to contributing to global peace, progress and prosperity in this strife-torn and conflict-ridden world.

All said and done, one must not lose sight of the unfolding scenario that profound changes are casting a long shadow on China as the country's political system is set to shortly undergo consequential reforms, pending final approval at next year's congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC). President Xi Jinping, the Party Chairman and the helmsman of the country is intent to shepherd China on a new course, abandoning the principle of collective leadership. Xi Jinping is steering China away from the path taken by Deng Xiaoping after the dark days of the cultural revolution and back towards a system of absolute "one man rule" without term limits as under Mao Zedong.

### **Summing Up:**

It is now abundantly clear from the above that US – China relations in this day and age of instantaneous communications and rapidly and radically changing world, marked by knowledge society and proliferating service industries cannot escape the reality of working together in a spirit of constructive cooperative and mutual accommodation. It is with this end in view and as a fence-mending exercise both the leaders of America and China decided to turn the page on a new Us-China relationship as characterized by the November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021 more than three hours video call in which President Joe Biden and Xi Jinping decided to put everything in cold storage and reiterated to begin a fresh, new chapter of friendship and camaraderie and move US-China relations forward in a positive, forward-looking and future-oriented direction. In a long virtual meeting, they offered reassurances on the most prickly issues and troubling points in the bilateral relationship like independence of Island of Taiwan, military build-up in South China sea, new developments in Afghanistan, trade war, climate change, energy security, public health and the nuclear program of North Korea and Iran. The video call meeting speaks much about the dire state of relations that this conclusion-free meeting held online because the Chinese President is all throughout confined to his home country, not meeting any foreign leader – since the Covid-19 pandemic erupted. This virtual meeting is rated and dubbed as a modest breakthrough.

As Biden is presented in China as a more pragmatic president than his predecessor and XI is looked in China as a no-nonsense and reasonable leader with whom Washington can do business with, America and China in the interests of world peace, global stability and human welfare, need to pivot away from intense competition and find a pathway to co-exist sustainably. While it is true that one simple video call cannot begin to fix a relationship in crisis, it is equally true that US-China relations must be managed responsibly driving Sino-US relations based on mutual respect and mutual interests living side by side caring, sharing and mutually accommodating each other, warts and all, indefinitely into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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## Nepal's Relations with Rising China and Prospect of Trilateral Cooperation



- Pradhumna B. Shah<sup>1</sup>

### Nepal-China Relations

Although relations between Nepal and China were formalized following the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1955, their friendly relations date back to time immemorial. China is Nepal's close friend, trustworthy neighbor and a reliable development partner. They have been maintaining exemplary friendship without any issues of severe and controversial nature. Nepal is firm on its 'One China Policy' and is committed not to allow any kind of anti-China activities on its soil. Irrespective of size, levels of development and different political systems, Nepal and China have always respected each other's sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity and economic development.

The visit of the President of Nepal to China in March 2019 and the official visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Nepal later the same year in October are considered significant in the annals of resetting Nepal-China relations as both sides elevated the relations to a "Strategic Partnership" featuring everlasting friendship for development and prosperity. The Chinese President also pledged to assist Nepal in transforming it from a landlocked country to a land-linked country, which will definitely help Nepal coordinate its economic activities across geographical regions. These visits were preceded by the visit of Prime Minister of Nepal in June 2018 during which fourteen different agreements/MoUs/LoEs including Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Railway Projects were signed between the two governments.

### Nepal's journey from Silk Road to Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Historically, Nepal already allowed the trans-Himalayan routes for trading of wool, salt and many other products between China and South Asian nations. The routes known as salt trade routes along the trans-Himalayan trails in the northern belt of Nepal are yet popular conduits for trade between Nepal and Tibet.

With the signing of the MOU on Cooperation under Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2017, a new chapter of bilateral cooperation between Nepal and China has begun. While China's rise has been spectacular, the BRI will undoubtedly give benefits to many countries in the region and eventually Nepal gets opportunities for mammoth

<sup>1</sup> Former residential Ambassador of Nepal to Brazil and accredited to Argentina, Paraguay and Chile, during which he become the first dean of the SAARC Group of Ambassadors in Brazil.

benefits in the areas of investment, connectivity, trade and people-to-people relations. Given the prospect for the financial integration and policy coordination between the two countries, BRI could be an instrument for Nepal to get access to the global value chain.

Among the nine projects under BRI flagship (4 roads, 2 hydroelectricity plants, 1 cross-border railways, 1 cross border transmission line and 1 technical institution), the Trans-Himalayan railway project carries much attraction for Nepalese because it could be an economic and geopolitical game-changer. A feasibility study for the electrified train link from Kerung to Kathmandu via Langtang region and Rasuwa (72.25 Km which will cost over 3 billion US\$) and onward to Pokhara and Lumbini was completed in 2018. But not much has happened, mainly because of project's technical and geological challenging nature (over 95% pass through high terrain with bridges and tunnels) compounded by political indecisiveness in Kathmandu. However, China has committed for DPR during President Xi's visit to Nepal and the Chinese side has also announced that roads and railway projects connecting Tibet and Nepal fall under their priorities. Further, the financing part of the project has become a riddle to be solved. (Nepal may consider to follow the cost benefit model like Laos and Thailand (30:70) did for their just completed and ongoing trans-border railway projects under BRI, if not possible for full Chinese grant assistance)

The Chinese offer to use its three dry ports: Lanzhou, Lhasa and Shigaste and four sea ports: Shenzhen, Lianyungang, Zhanjiang and Tianjin for Nepal's trade also has great significance in the attempt to become a land linked nation. As Nepal links China with South Asia, China, too, is a gateway for Nepal to diversify its trade relations. The transit and transportation agreement signed with China has provided Nepal with access to the sea through Tianjin, the largest port (nearest from Nepal 3300Km away) in Northern China and maritime gateway, for its third country trade. However, viability of using them becomes manifest only in the aftermath of operationalization of major Nepal-China cross border points through connectivity and realization of BRI projects in Nepal.

### **Rise of China, changing global and regional dynamics and Nepal**

The center of gravity of the global economy has been shifting towards Asia where China has a lead role to play. China has made unprecedented progress through socio-economic transformation in the last seven decades since the founding of People's Republic of China. On completion of centenary of the CPC, China has recently introduced a new robust and innovative development design matching to upcoming global challenges.

The challenges posed by China's rise have led powerful countries to adopt a stringent approach to ensure a rules-based order in the region from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean broadly known as the Indo-Pacific strategy (IPS). A four nation Quad (India, Japan, Australia and USA) approach wherein India has a central role, is considered an extended hand of the IPS. Recently, a new security pact has also been announced by UK, US and Australia (AUKUS) aimed to counter the challenge posed by China's military presence in the Indo-Pacific region. These developments which have increased the focus of powerful nations in the Indo Pacific maritime domain have evolved the most vulnerable flash point for their rivalry and potential clash. The Indo-Pacific maritime corridor, through which over sixty percent of global trade passes (more than 5 trillion dollars), also houses ten out of twenty fastest emerging economies of the world.

The strategic importance of Nepal situated between the rising global power China and regional power India, has become a matter of greater global concern. This has, in tandem, offered myriad challenges as well as opportunities for Nepal. To augment benefit out of the situation in favor of national interest is the great challenge for Nepal and showing its favor to neither neighbor demands a high degree of diplomatic maneuvering taking into account the sensitivities of both neighbors.

Nepal needs to rethink seriously not only to develop clarity but also to build reliability in its meaningful relations with China for its prosperity and secure future. There is no need to make any fundamental change in Nepal's basic priorities and dynamics with regard to relations with China, except timely tuning in its relations addressing the sensitivities and developments taking place in rising China.

The smooth partnership between Nepal and China has so far crossed more than six and a half decades. China has become the largest source of foreign investment, second largest trade partner, second largest source of inbound tourists and a major development partner of Nepal. While rejoicing in China's achievements and successes we wish to get spillover benefit to make Nepal prosperous. Pursuit of our cooperation with China should focus primarily on connectivity, production and technology.

### **Concerns of global powers while engaging with China**

As the economic growth of China is sustained, the rise of China is globally professed as a significant transformation in the global economic, political and military balance of the 21st century.

The Indo-Pacific strategy (IPS) has emerged as a reaction to China's strategic build up in the South China Sea and its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is a massive design to create a cross-continental geo-economic and geo-strategic space, both on land and sea, through infrastructure, investments and connectivity.

If any question of redefining IPS or MCC and BRI arises, answers would depend on exploring ways to disassociate it from security obligations of the projects and accepting economic assistance from all friendly nations without undermining the paramount interest of the nation at all. As Nepal is marching ahead towards graduating from LDC to a developing nation's status, our developmental pursuit should orient itself to self-reliance as against over dependency on grant assistance with loaded conditionalities. We should also carefully refrain from accepting projects under foreign loans which may lead us to a debt-trap.

Nepal as a sovereign, independent and non-aligned nation needs, and should maintain, cooperative friendly relations with China and India as well as with other powers but not at the cost of one and the other. Nepal, at the same time, also needs to formulate a clear neighborhood policy focused on addressing issue based engagement. Difference on an issue should not affect the very bedrock of friendly relations existing between and among friendly countries. While Sino-U.S and Sino-Indian relations are at their lowest point in decades, Nepal needs to adopt a policy strategy by meticulously sidestepping from their likely implications on its foreign policy.

### **Nepal's prospects for bridging the two most populous Asian markets**

In view of the tendency of shifting power and development pivot to Asia and in the context of Nepal being situated between India and China, this country occupies an extremely strategic and advantageous location, which is beneficial to investors, manufacturers and businessmen in setting up their business in Nepal with access to huge markets close to one third global population.

The location of vast BEMs of over two and half billion population on the north and south sides from Nepal provides greater prospects of luring multinational conglomerates to this country as the factors of production i.e. land and labor are comparatively cheaper in Nepal. (In the context of current shifting trend of American and Japanese companies to Vietnam, Thailand, Bangladesh, India etc. from China)

Despite competition and adversarial relations on many counts, India and China have collaborative and cooperative relations on many issues. This becomes clear when we look at a record of trade between India and China that reached \$114 billion this year, despite Sino-Indian border tussles and corona pandemic. Even Bangladesh's trade with China has crossed \$13 billion. India's export to China has also considerably increased in 2021 narrowing its balance of payment with China compared to earlier years.

If we look at the nearest past, there was noticeable progress in resetting India-China relations when PM Modi and President Xi had multiple rounds of Wuhan and Chennai informal meetings in April 2018 and October 2019 respectively. Based on the Wuhan spirit of cooperation, it was agreed to steer and map out a long term strategic

perspective and work to realize the great rejuvenation of two great civilizations. Nevertheless, the Doklam and Galwan Valley (Ladakh) border standoff between China and India of recent past had considerably eroded their relations with room for chances of improvement as both the top leaders so far have not made any scathing comment on their border skirmishes. Moreover, they have various forums to meet and reconcile the differences like SCO, BRICS and G-20 among others, where both India and China meet frequently in the sidelines. Chinese and Indian defense ministers met in Moscow in 2020 Sept in the margin of SCO which paved the way to defusing the possible clash in the Sino-Indian borders. Further Russian President Putin has planned to convene soon an India, Russia and China (IRC) summit aimed to improve Sino-India relations.

Being close and populous markets for their supplies of raw and finished products, both countries are under compulsion to work together to achieve developmental thrust by creating conducive conditions to improve their bilateral ties and promote pragmatic cooperation. India is fully aware that it is eager to join Nuclear Supply Group (NSG) and aspires to get UN Security Council membership for which Chinese support is imperative. Besides, they share many common positions with regard to trade, climate change and multilateralism.

Nepal has the potential to serve as a bridge between South Asia and China leading eventually to Central Asia through transit and connectivity. Trade between India and China via Nepal would be reduced to 2/3 of their transit cost compared to maritime route currently being used by them. (Distance from Kunming to New Delhi via HK sea is 10437, through land via Nepal it is 2911 KM and from Kunming to Chennai via sea it is 7004 via land Nepal 3564KM) Thus, using the corridor of Nepal would not only save time and cost to both China and India for their merchandise but also help divert the maritime congestion of the Indo pacific waters and save fossil fuel burning in the cargo ships.

The two major electric railways projects are in pipeline in Nepal after the signing of agreements with China from Kerong to Kathmandu and with India from Raxaul to Kathmandu. It gives a clear indication that both India and China are keen to execute their ever growing trade via Nepal. In view of these developments, it is justifiable for Nepal to pronounce the proposition of making Nepal a vibrant economic bridge between China and South Asia. And, this would be the most opportune time and cost effective route for trading with all stakeholder nations in the region, which is expected to create a win-win situation beneficial to all. For this, Nepal should opt for equal partnership unlike 2+1 concept floated during second Chennai informal meeting held between Indian and Chinese leaders. Additionally, this route will also help bring together the peoples of two great Asian/ ancient civilizations as well.

## **What further endeavors does Nepal need to strengthen and diversify its relations with China**

Today, while China's global influence has increased manifold and its growing global engagements have generated a sense of an emerging new world order, how Nepal could reap benefits from the rise of China should be an important concern for Nepal. In the process of resetting Nepal's relations with rising China some points to be considered are given below:

- Replace the Nepal-China Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1960 in line with the term strategic cooperative partnership for development and prosperity and a land linked nation as stated during Chinese President's visit to Nepal in October 2019. (*Peace and Friendship Treaty (1960); Boundary Treaty (1961); Cultural Agreement (1999); Treaty of Trade and Other Related Matters (2002); Transit and Transport Agreement (2016); MoU on Jointly Developing Belt and Road Initiative (2017); MoU on Cross Border Power Transmission Line (2018); MoU on Railway Cooperation Projects and Mutual Legal Assistance both signed in (2019). (Three separate draft extradition treaties from China, India and Pakistan are pending in the court of Nepal)*)
- Enhance the level and number of connectivity opening more north-south corridors closer to the northern border points and facilitate the transport of goods and people. Out of 43 cross border entries along Nepal-China borders, six are currently feasible and three of them are strategic whereas only Rasuwa/Khasa are operational.
- Develop road, railway links, pipelines and transmission lines connecting Nepal and China in all feasible border areas so that Nepal can benefit from the proximity to China.
- Lobby for the execution of the railway project connecting Kerung with Kathmandu, under the Chinese grants, rather than soft loans. It is perceived that China will eventually benefit after the realization of proposed Kerung and Raxaul-Kathmandu railways with access to South Asian market and India, too, will get easy access up to Central Asia.
- Chart out a future course of China-Nepal relations in the twenty-first century and adopt a vision roadmap for mutual cooperation to promote enduring friendship.
- Develop conducive environment for exports from Nepal to China by developing more production hubs (Agriculture/herbs/assembling/mining exploration etc.) closer to the border aimed at giving export cargo load to the returnee wagons of proposed trans-Himalayan railways.
- Lure innovation based technologies from China and enhance transmission grid connectivity along the borders for future export of hydro energy from Nepal. We need to conclude power trade agreement with China as well.

- Address concern and sensitivities of China and explore Nepalese worker's involvement in the massive development undertaking in Tibet as the working population there is very small. (Tibetan refugees residing in Nepal appears to be a hurdle for opening sensitive border points and also for jobs to Nepalese workers in Tibet despite their dearth of workers due to aging and controlled child policy)
- Completion of a new trade agreement with removal of all unnecessary trade barriers for easing the export trade from Nepal to China and prepare a blueprint/ viability for use of three dry ports and four sea ports agreed upon for use of import/export to China and beyond from Nepal.
- Historically Nepal-China relations flourished on the bedrock of cultural connections. We need to capitalize on cultural and civilizational connections as strong soft power for mutual benefit by establishing monuments of legendary figures like Shakyamuni, Fa Xian, Bhrikuti and Araniko in Nepal and China symbolizing their historic contributions, thereby help promote pilgrimage tourism.
- Resolving border differences, if any, and opt to set zero pillar in both tri-junction areas of Nepal-India and China borders. A proposal to develop a trilateral SEZs with land of all three nations in tri-junction (near Darchula and Taplejung of Nepal) for development of the people of that area could be a lofty idea, if agreed upon by the trio nations, as move to resolve tri-junction border dispute.

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## Cultural Aspects of Nepal-South Korea Relations



- *Rajaram Bartaula*<sup>1</sup>

Nepal and the Republic of Korea established diplomatic relations on 15 May 1974. Since then, both countries have enjoyed excellent bilateral relations. In order to enhance bilateral cooperation, both countries have concluded Agreements on Korean Youth Volunteers in January 1992, the EDCF Agreement in September 1997, the Agreement on the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with respect to Taxes on Income in October 2001, Air Services Agreement in March 2005, and the Culture Agreement in April 2005. In 2007, the Nepalese and Korean Governments signed MOU on EPS (Employment Permit System) for recruiting Nepalese workers. The agreement on Consultation Mechanism between the two ministries of foreign affairs of the two governments to hold meetings in both the capitals alternatively to review and evaluate achievements on bilateral cooperation and advice the governments of both the parties to take appropriate measure to further enhance the level of cooperation at multiple fronts.

Although the diplomatic relations were established in 1974, the actual cooperation from the Republic of Korea began after the signing of an agreement on Korean Youth Volunteers in 1992. The Korean government made its efforts to assist in the socio-economic development of Nepal through various development programs under the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) since 1991. By the time Nepal and Korea had established diplomatic relations, the socio-economic state of the Republic of Korea was similar that of Nepal. However with the prudent policies measures, Korea transformed from one of the poorest countries to one of the developed countries in short span of time. It was an exemplary experience of socio-economic transformation. Its journey from aid recipient country to joining as a rich country's club establishing itself as a donor country has been cited as one of the best examples of the success in the world. Korea became the 24th member of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) in 2010.

In this context, based on their own experience, the Korean government has accorded priority to the human resources development which will serve as a basis of national development and thus has extended cooperation in the health, education and ICT

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<sup>1</sup> Former Under Secretary at the MOFA; also served as DCM at the EoN, Seoul, S. Korea (2011-2014)

sectors of Nepal. Today, Nepal has been selected as one of the core countries among 25 others for Korea's ODA.

In spite of the economic development, Korea has also given its importance to the cultural affinity and bond that subsists as a heritage of Buddhism since centuries between our two countries. In view of its religious importance as well as one of the holiest places among four Lumbini (Birthplace), Bodhagaya (the place of his enlightenment), Sarnath (Where he delivered his first teaching), and Kusinagar (Where he died), the Korean Buddhists have built a temple in Lumbini. Under the assistance of the Government of Korea, a master plan for the development of greater Lumbini is also being drawn.

The foundation of Nepal-Korea relations is more about the cultural than the socio-economic cooperation. In historical perspective, the Buddhism thrived in Korea after it took hold in China and made inroads to Japan through Korea. It is this cultural and religious affinity and attachment that bind together the friendly bonds between Nepal and the Republic of Korea, which can be seen in the Lantern Festival. Since the Lantern Festival is taking place continuously from antiquity on its own cultural flavor and spirit, it was in 2013 that the Chief Monk of Dosun Sa monastery Ven. Sunmook Hyeja thought of connecting its sacredness with Lumbini and drew a plan to bring in the peace torch from Lumbini to Korea during Lantern Festival.

One of the long cherished cultural assets inherited since centuries by the Korean is Lantern Festival. It is celebrated in honour of Light of Asia Shakyamuni Buddha at his birthday that falls in Buddha Purnima. However, the celebration of Buddha Purnima, according to Korean calendar, differs about a week in Korea than in Nepal, it is the same Purnima that falls in Baishak. The Lantern Festival celebrated enthusiastically in major cities in general and particularly with spectacular show in Seoul, is one of the cultural master pieces of Korea. The Lanterns of different colours and designs carried in hand by devout Buddhists, commoners and chariots decorated during the



*(Nepali living in Seoul Participating in the Lantern Festival with a Chariot: a young lady emulating as Mayadevi)*

burning continuously. The Eternal Peace Flame also symbolizes the ageless wisdom that the Buddha propounded for common benefit of all sentient being. Realizing its importance, the peace flame was carried to Shanghai, China during Shanghai Expo and lit amidst a celebration on September 3, 2010 by Rt. Hon. Ram Baran Yadav, President of Nepal.

Encouraged by it, the Senior Monks of Korea were inclined and passionate to bring in the eternal peace flame from the birthplace of Buddha to one of the holiest temple in Korea. On April 18, 2013, the peace torch was lit amid a ritual ceremony in Lumbini and transported the same day overland to Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. The flame was transported by land route through China and reached to Incheon Harbor, Korea by ship. From there on the peace torch was taken to DMZ, the most fortified border between the South and North Korea, for a ritual ceremony organized for praying lasting peace and peaceful unification of two Koreas. Finally, it was taken to Dosunsa monastery and ablaze in its premises with a ritual ceremony at a time coinciding with the Lantern Festival, which was witnessed by all the heads of Buddhist orders, Venerable Senior Monks as well as High dignitaries of the Government of Korea. Since then the flame is burning continuously as a symbol of world peace. Prior to its permanent settlement, the flame of peace torch were also distributed to other associated 108 monasteries all over Korea for its setting in the premise of monasteries for the common benefit of Korean people and devout Buddhists in its surrounding. The “Eternal Peace Flame” was also taken out in the procession for public during “Lantern Festival”, one of the largest festivals celebrated in Buddha Purnima, in Seoul.

The presence of Eternal Peace Flame in the Lantern Festival showcased the cultural value and became able to pass a message of world peace and brotherhood. The age-old cultural relationship between Nepal and Korea was taken a new height of amity, friendship and cooperation after this event. The place in Korea where the Peace flame has been permanently installed has become a symbolic place for pilgrimage as well as touristic destination. For Nepal, it would help in developing relationship at the people’s level. The establishment of Eternal Peace Flame in Korean Monasteries has not only enhanced the cultural and religious friendship between Nepal and Korea but also opened-up the avenues of further cooperation in multiple sectors. Undoubtedly it would put lasting effects in our bilateral relations in the days to come.



*(Nepalese participating in the procession of Lantern Festival on their traditional Nepalese attires)*

Contributions of Nepali diaspora and their organizations in participating in the procession with chariots beautifully designed of Nepali temple art with aesthetical touch have been praise worthy. While passing through the streets surrounding areas of Dongdemun and on way to the main city center, thousands of spectators and bystanders at the pathways, express their respect with a bow to the Nepali chariot. In all the years serving in Seoul at the Nepali diplomatic mission, I had the opportunities to be a part of the procession and watch closely the depth and magnitude of cultural affinity between Nepal and the Republic of Korea. The festival was not only an opportunity to exhibit cultural-religious affinity but also an important occasion to showcase the exposition of Nepali costumes of diverse ethnicities with multicultural flavor.

Since diplomacy is also meant to conduct soft diplomacy, promoting tourism and culture as its vital components of many others of the home country into the receiving country, the government requires to give proper attention with the emphasis by providing financial resources in order to empower its missions abroad so that the missions can conduct several promotional activities without any hitches.

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## Taliban led-Afghanistan, UN and Nepalese Perspectives



- Dr. Rambhakta Thakur<sup>1</sup>

### Preview:

The fall of king Zahir Shah of Afghanistan in a coup d'état in 1974 was the beginning of a revolution to establish Afghanistan Republic on national level. Mohammad Daoud Khan seized power. This political game gave a rise of the influence of the then Soviet Union who later invaded Afghanistan on December 24, 1979 under the pretext of upholding the Soviet –Afghan Friendship Treaty and to keep free the country from the clutches of the Islamic insurgents and Mujahidins. But this could not last very long, in 1989 February Soviet Union was compelled to withdraw from Afghanistan and consequently a civil war abruptly protruded until the Taliban rose up against the country's government and warlords, and established a theocratic regime (1996-2001).

Paradoxically, this regime also could not see long life and, as a result, in 2001 US finally invaded Afghanistan and overthrown the Taliban Government, and established the democracy to bring in to practice in Afghanistan with the help of European forces which further ironically collapsed in the hand of Taliban on August 15, 2021. Eventually, in a press conference, Taliban has renamed Afghanistan as 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan'.

### American Withdrawal and Onwards:

American decision to withdraw from Afghanistan had taken the world with a great surprise. For US, it was not a fait accompli in a diplomatic term, however, the new leadership of Joe Biden, president of US, had made a withdrawal speech defending his action as right time to end this war which hurt many who had strong belief on the power and words of US. Similarly, the people of Afghanistan felt betrayed and thus helpless in the fear of atrocity of Taliban on the pretext of Sharia-Law. American action was taken as changing a paradigm ending an era of 'military operations to remake other countries'. International forces involved there also followed the decision of America.

The change of regime in Afghanistan has got a catastrophic effects particularly in the neighboring countries. Neighboring country India was badly shocked who has so much invested in Afghanistan in the fields of education, infrastructure, trade, industry

<sup>1</sup> Former Ambassador of Nepal to Egypt (2005-2010), Former Election Commissioner, Advisor to the Foreign Minister & Chief of Protocol.

and human resources. India also executed large projects like: Zaranj - Dolaram road connecting Iran; with the Kandahar -Herat highway; the Pule - Khumri power line over the Salang Pass that even today carries Uzbek electricity to Kabul; and many more including construction of the Afghanistan Parliament. On the other side, in Pakistan, the atmosphere was different. They celebrated the second return of Taliban and demonstrated as if this is their own victory.

In the diplomatic dynamics of Indian external relations, the second return to power of Taliban in Kabul is a plateful of problems. The biggest being it needs to be prepared for Pakistani military – ISI complex using the situation in Afghanistan to step up anti-India terror activities. So far as India's role in a new Afghanistan is concerned, its strategic gurus appear to be clueless. There is no blue print or integrated road map to deal with the China – Pakistan challenge to India's strategic investment in Afghanistan. India is now sidelined on the emerging future of Afghanistan, affecting in free access to Central Asia through the Afghanistan border.

Assessing a terrorist threat from Afghanistan, India, using its presidency in the United Nations has adopted a resolution calling for Afghan territory not to be used to shelter terrorists. Interestingly, while mentioning support to Muslim of all over the world including Jammu and Kashmir, Taliban has skipped mentioning of Xinjiang and Chechnya, both sites of alleged atrocities on Muslim in believed to be more political in nature. China and Russia have come out in recent months to support the Taliban. China and Russia worked together in the UNSC recent days as they jointly abstained on Resolution 2593. Both countries objected to the non-inclusion of IS and ETIM (East Turkestan Islamic Movement) of the Uighur in the resolution. China and Russia both are determined to influence the Taliban regime to keep promise on preventing terrorism and drug trafficking. A part from that, US, World Bank, and IMF have threatened Taliban not to abuse human rights, service to women and girls, education and social freedom. Taliban had promised in the beginning of taking power time not to misuse the power against civil freedom of women and girls and also agreed to adopt an inclusive government in modern Afghanistan. But under the hard pressure of hardliners Muslim leaders the promises was reneged in the later days. During the course of these developments, the European Union has also been waiting with billion dollars assistance in return of application of reforms in the direction of Universal Human Rights by Taliban which is yet to be materialized. Reluctance of complying with the world expectations makes the immediate recognition of Taliban Regime is in a question. US, Russia and China have stressed in many occasions that 'This is an interim government ...it can't be really called representative or inclusive'.

But, whatever are the changed circumstances, China has a fair chance to establish geostrategic footholds in the new Taliban –led Afghanistan. The new Taliban regime also termed 'China its most important partner' for aid, investment and infrastructure projects .Thus seems, China is in a better position today in the role of a game changer.

## **UN Action And Humanitarian Assistance:**

When sovereignty of a nation stands with vital importance in a troubled-nation then humanitarian intervention assistances have been found questionable many times in the recent past history of the world. In Iraq (Kurd), Yugoslavia or Somalia; the humanitarian interventions under the UN umbrella could not gather much applauses. There many purposes were uncertain and consequences were questionable. This type of syndrome should not be raised in Taliban Afghanistan this time. Thus just ‘humanitarian assistances’ has to be mobilized with a clear purpose in the prescribed limited domains. The emphasis on the word ‘humanitarian’ has been a neutral corollary of the complete absence of a serious long term policy in respect of the target country. With a clear objective and fixed time table of ‘humanitarian assistance’ thus has been acceptable in the disaster-faced country with which no one wants to quarrel.

Seeing the sensitiveness in UN activities and humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, the distribution of necessary relief materials like food, clothes, medicines, education materials etc have to be channelized through the related agencies. Covid-19 has also badly threatened the majority of the population; cold waves, starvation, child malnutrition, and environment degradation are the immediate dangers to be addressed as suggested by the Secretary General of the United Nations. In these circumstances, humanitarian assistance has strategically become must for saving the lives at any cost in Afghanistan where 17 million children are under malnutrition and 70% population are living below poverty line.

Against this vulnerable background, therefore, the Security Council unanimously approved a resolution stressing that Afghanistan’s new Taliban rulers needs to establish an inclusive government with ‘the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and upholding the human rights’. It also extended the current mandate of the United Nations political mission in Afghanistan for six months and stressed ‘the important role that the United Nations will continue to play in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan’. This new mandate is known as UNAMA, until March 17, 2022; giving members time to assess the actions of the Taliban government in the coming months. This has been occasionally practiced in 1990s as ‘second generation humanitarian enforcement and operations’ in Kurd, Somalia, Serbia, Lebanon and Haiti are the best examples where there humanitarian operations were channelized keeping the UN values alive within the humanitarian assistance principles.

Unfortunately, peoples of Afghanistan have been suffering today very badly without their faults. Gross Domestic Products shrink to 20 percent. Government has even not enough money to pay the salaries of the employees. Workers are under paid and unfed. In this case only one way is open either to take shelter or leave the country as refugee to other countries. During the first Taliban regime arrival in power 1996 in Kabul, a big number of Afghani people had left the country and took refuge to

many countries mainly in US, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Turkey, Pakistan, and India. This time, UNHCR has alerted for the large flux of refugees. Worldwide refugees are registered about 20 million and the same numbers of displaced persons.

Besides the political stability and recognition of Afghanistan, the socio-economic appalling scenario urgently demands the UN to augment its humanitarian assistance efforts without further delay considering the collapse situation of the helpless people. Learning from the past experiences, UN should also be careful in understanding that it cannot create peace but can only create an atmosphere of the country to be able to fight back with the adverse situation and bring the country back to the right track. There is a similar example of Congo in 1960s where UN tried to help but Soviet had reversed its policy and opposed the authority of the UN. In any case, the UN should not become a military target. 'Therefore, the UN could not create through peace-enforcement what did not already exist; a willingness on the part of the warring parties to negotiate for peace'.

### **Nepal's Role:**

At present, Nepal is the chair of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Being the leader of the South Asia, it must take an initiative of helping the international community to accept the fait accompli of Taliban victory at the one hand, while pressing the hardliner Muslim Taliban to accept the values of pluralism and multilateralism on the other. But first, Nepal should evacuate 5000-10000 Nepalese withheld in Afghanistan. Many have been returned yet many waiting to come. Nepal has also received some hundred Afghan refugees coming to Nepal mostly via India and Bangladesh that has to be managed with the help of UNHCR. There may be terrorists in disguised forms that need to be very carefully handled because of the proximity with India. Though, Nepal has taken a neutral position as a situation is very fragile, however, in the press releases of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Nepal has urged all parties concerned to ensure the safety, security, and well-being of the people. Nepal broadly supports the call from the international communities to respect and facilitate the safe and orderly departure of all those who wish to leave the country through roads, airports, or border crossing and call upon those in a position to do so for the protection of human life and property and maintenance of peace, order and stability.

Nepal wishes to see a lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan, a fellow member of SAARC, and the continued progress and prosperity of the friendly people of Afghanistan.

SAARC members India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are taking part in the UN and EU initiated dialogue for providing humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and extending essential supports for meeting the basic needs of Afghan people. In this context of mounting international pressure and needs of the hour, Nepal, as chair

of SAARC, should try to play a felicitor role at this critical time to bring back Afghanistan in to the SAARC fold without being influenced by India, China, Pakistan, Saudi or western countries interests there.

China and Russia have already made their moves to establish relations with Taliban government. New Delhi has been stung by Ashraf Ghani's downfall, given their steadfast support for him while it is also reported rejoicing in Islamabad. US has already announced \$144 million in humanitarian aid for the people of Afghanistan. Similarly G20 agreed to aid to advert Afghanistan humanitarian crisis without recognizing the government. In this scenario, Nepal must take a proactive diplomatic approach and use its bilateral relations to usher a new peace initiative in the region. At this difficult period, best option is left for Nepal is to send immediately humanitarian assistance materials by airplane or financial help as a token of friendship within the framework of SAARC and international humanitarian obligations. This is a fair opportunity for Nepal to demonstrate its ability and skill by applying diplomatic maneuvers in Afghanistan in order to bring peace by creating an inclusive society and respect for the universal human rights especially to women and girls. On top of that should also keep in mind that Taliban - led Afghanistan must not use its territory for export of terrorism and permit its place for the shelter of terrorist in any form. Further, an envoy could be sent to take the stock of the situation and to be a help for felicitors. Although, Nepal has not much direct trade, investment and tourism business with Afghanistan but the efforts of establishing a respect for universal order could change the socio-economic scenario there undoubtedly.

### **Conclusion:**

The withdrawal of American and international forces from Afghanistan was messy, hit by terror and tragic, especially for Afghani people. Not only for Afghani people but the neighbouring countries and many others far located found the withdrawal behaviour of U.S. from Afghanistan is irresponsible. Newspapers and intellectuals of this region have raised their eye brows and termed the withdrawal of America "losing its face and credibility". China and India are shocked particularly because they have heavily invested in that country in the hope of political stability backed by the American security. The South Asian Security balance has been disturbed and all stakeholders are in confusion as to the future actions and their protection. Russia, India, China are worried for their territorial security reasons. In Afghanistan itself, brutality on women, girls and other ethnic groups are found deplorable. Economically, Afghanistan has reached at the level of a failed stage which needs a magnanimous help to reactivate the economy and fighting with the climate change, cold waves and Covid-19. Starvation is at alarming stage and that if not addressed at this critical period of time then it may become a cause of million deaths of infants and minor population.

US, EU and others are standing harsh with the Taliban-led government who has brutally rundown all measures of human rights and democracy. Aid, investment and financial assistances all are stopped and billions of dollars of Afghanistan deposited to foreign capital are frozen. Economic sanctions are applied to force the Taliban government to bring reform in the country according to the new world order. Except Russia, China and Turkey, all other embassies are closed. Taliban government is facing a sort of embargo for not accepting the basic human rights and democracy in the country. But it has not forbidden the humanitarian assistance; it has to be continued so that the people of Afghanistan should not be deprived from these basic rights of saving their lives. UN has to play a bridging role by assisting the humanitarian assistance at the same time making the country capable to start its economic activities. But, unfortunately, the motion of cooperation and humanitarian aid are not taking place in the anticipated speed because there is trust deficit which hampers the international cooperation. It should never forget that UN intervention has no role there that would become a military target for UN. This point should keep in mind very carefully in the present context of Afghanistan.

With respect to Nepal, having recognized the international concerns, it must not miss this opportunity of playing a leading role as SAARC leader. Nepal should not make any delay in providing humanitarian assistance in the form of cash and kinds to this member state of SAARC to manifest its solidarity and brotherhood. Foreign Minister of Nepal should visit Kabul to take stock of situation or at least a special mission should go there with UN assistance to provide necessary humanitarian aids and also, if possible, to help in initiating a dialogue or playing a role of felicitor. A confidence has to be expressed and built-up at the particular juncture.

But, more serious fact is that the ball is in the court of Afghan Taliban leaders – now, Taliban has a crucial role to play in carrying out the duties of a responsible nation according to the principles of the United Nations. Respect for human rights, including rights of women and girls, will win its respect internationally and for Afghan people. Inclusive government and respect of way of life is priority for Taliban government. Further, corruption has been a serious issue which eroded the previous government's legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Good governance and effective delivery of basic services could therefore instill trust in the new government and reinforce its mandate. This includes the government's attention to former refugees and other returned migrants whose reintegration will be critical for Afghanistan's future. Therefore, it would be better for the Afghan government to fulfill and accept the Universal Human Rights and democracy to be internationally acceptable for getting their legitimate place in the United Nations. Hopefully, Afghanistan will go for a fresh, free and fair election so that peace and stability in Afghanistan may prevail and a balanced regional security order would be re-established without further violence in a complete harmony of SAARC peace order.

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## सिवासंग रोमान्स

डा. रामभक्त ठाकुर<sup>1</sup>



राजदूत भएर मिश्र (ईजिप्) आएको धेरै भएको थिएन । राजधानी कायरोमा नै पुरातात्विक भग्नावशेष, नील नदीको सुन्दरता र आदिवासीका गाऊँ तिरका विशिष्ट जीवन अवलोकन गर्दा गर्दै आनन्दित भई रहेको थिएँ । पुराना अरबका जनजीवन, गीत, संस्कृतिले मलाई धेरै नै प्रभावित गर्न शुरू गरिसकेको थियो । असीमित रेगिस्तान, ऊँडका काफिला र खजुरका वृक्षहरूले मेरो हृदय आकर्षित गर्न शुरू गरेको चालै पाईन । अझ फाराहो (हजारौ वर्षदेखि मिश्रका बादशाह) का सभ्यता पिरामिड, कलाकृति, विकाशमा योगदानबारे अलिअलि पढेर गएकै थिएँ, त्यहाँ साकार हेर्न पाउँदा हर्ष विभोर हुँदै गईरहेको थिएँ । साथ साथै मैले आफ्नो धर्मग्रन्थमा रामका शोरा लव-कुश आर्यावर्तबाद पश्चिम गएका थिए सो कडीको क्रम पश्चिममा खोज्दै थिएँ ।

एक दिन राजदूतावासमा कार्य गरिरहेको बेला मिश्री महिला सेक्रेटरीले आएर एउटा पत्र देखाईन र भनिन्-“महामहिम ! मिश्र सरकारले सिवाको चार दिनको भ्रमण कूदनैतिक नियोग प्रमुखहरूका लागि बनाएको ५ यसमा हाम्रो सहभागिताको अपेक्षा गरेको ५ ।” सिवा एउटा पुरानो ऐतिहासिक अउँ हो भन्ने कुरा मलाई थाह थियो । अफिसमा साथीहरूसँग राय विचार गरेँ । सबैले जानुपर्छ र यहाँको संस्कृति बुझ्न यसले मरत गर्छ भन्ने राय भए पछि मैले त्यहाँ जान आफ्नो स्वीकृति दिएँ ।

सेक्रेटरी आसिया प्रशन्न भई फर्केर खबर गर्न गईन् । सिवा पर्यटन स्थलबारे ज्यादा जानकारी थिएन । तैपनि कौतुहल बढेर गयो । आगामी, हप्ता विहिवारका दिन बिहान आठ बजे निर्धारित अउँमा पुगें । ठूलो वातानुकूलित वसमा यात्रा शुरू भयो । मिश्र गएको तीन चार महिना मात्र भएको हुनाले मलाई भाषा आउँदैनथ्यो । इस्लामिक देश भएको हुनाले सबै थोक नयाँ । महिलासँग भन् भित्रभित्रै ढर लाग्थ्यो । हाम्रो देशमा जस्तै खुला समाज, महिला पुरुषमा कुनै भेदभाव नभएको अउँबाद गएको मानिस तर त्यहाँ नारीहरू कतै एकदम खुला वातावरणमा देखिन्थ्ये भने कतै पुरा हिजाव र नकावमा बुर्का (कालो लुगा) लगाएको । व्यवहारमा अलि पनि अपमान भयो भने ठूलो ढंढ हुन्छ भनि सुनेको हुनाले मैले मुसलमान नारीबाद परै रहने मन बनाएको थिएँ ।

नौ बजे यात्रा शुरू भयो । यात्राको गाईद एक महिला बसमा सामुने आईन र भनिन्-“गुडमनिङ्ग ! मेरो नाऊँ फातिमा हो । म यस यात्राका हजुरहरूको गाईद हुँ । यो यात्रा यहाँबाद सिवाका लागि शुरू भएको ५ । चार ३०क्षामा हामी ‘मासा माथरु’ मा पुग्ने शौँ तर यो अलेक्जेन्ट्रीयाको वादोबाद नगई अर्को राज पथबाद जाने ५ । त्यहाँ हामी दिउँसोको खाना र रात्री त्यही बस्ने शौँ । भोलीपल्द त्यहाँबाद हामी सिवाका लागि प्रस्थान गर्ने शौँ । केहि जानकारी चाहेमा अथवा समस्या भएमा मलाई कृपया सम्पर्क गर्नुहोला ।”

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सलक्क परेकी इशालिएन केदी जस्तो पात्ली, गोरी, अंग्रेजी भाषामा राम्रो देखल भएकी महिला कमिज र पैँद लगाएकी थिइन् तर दाउकोमा कालो स्कार्फ बाँधेकी थिइन् । एउटा आर्कषक व्यक्तित्व जस्तो । शायद राजदूतहरूसँग जाने राम्रो मान्ने खोजेर राखेको होला ।

बसमा हलुका कर्णप्रिय स्वरमा कुनै अरबी गीत बजिरहेको थियो । सारा कुदनैतिक समूह महिला-पुरुष प्रशान्त मुद्रामा गफिदै पनि थिए । बीच बाँधेमा एउटा रमणीय स्थानमा ग्रीसको समुन्द्री तटमा पाइने रेस्दुराँ जस्तैमा बस रोकियो । थकाई मार्न र चिया खान हामीलाई फातिमाले भनिन् । हामी तल औल्यौं । रेगिस्तान, अरब जस्तो त्यहाँ केहि पनि लागने । मेदिदेरियन सीको प्रेममा लहरै थुप्रै रेस्दुराँहरू थिए । एउटा महिला आएर हामीलाई स्वागत गरि त्यहाँ सबै थोक खजुरबाद नै बनेको परिकार बताइन् । केक, जुस, मिर्जाई आदि । हामी धेरै आनन्दित भयौं । उसले एलेक्जेन्डर त्यस जहाँमा आएको कुरा बताइन् ।

एलेक्जेन्डर (सिकन्दर) र कैलोपेद्रा र दुई चरित्रले मलाई किन हो किन धेरै प्रभावित गरेको थियो । यिनका बारे जहाँ जे पाए पनि हेरि हाल्ने र परि हाल्ने मेरो बानी थियो । कफी खाँदा खाँदै एउटा दम्पति मेरो देखुलमा बस्नुभयो । महिलाले आफुलाई मोरोक्कोको राजदूत भनि चिन्हाइन् । मैले पनि आफ्नु परिचय दिएँ । उनको पति इतिहास र पुरातत्वको राम्रो जानकारी राख्ने देखेर मैले सिकन्दर र कैलोपेद्रा बारे सोधे । उनी धेरै भावुक भएर भने -“यी दुई व्यक्तित्वले उनलाई सधैं प्रेरणा दिन्छन् ... म उनीहरूको ठूलो प्रशंसक हुँ ।” महिला राजदूतले आफ्नो नाऊँ मारिया बताएकी थिइन् । उनी पनि अत्यन्त युवावस्थामा चीनमा आफ्नो राजदूतावासमा काम गरेकी थिइन् र त्यहाँ एउटा नेपाली कूदनैति १ नवयुवकलाई चिन्हेकी थिइन् ।

“के नाऊ थियो ?” मैले सोधे

“राम ।”

“के ?”

“राम ! पुरा नाऊ आउँदैन तर सबैले उनलाई रामको नाऊले नै बोलाउथ्ये ।” मारिया कफी खाँदै मानौं अतीतमा दुबीन । म साँढै अचम्मित भए ।

“के गरी यसरी याद आयो रामको ?” मैले हाँस्दै सोधे ।

“अचम्मको कुरा । एक चोदि राजा सिहानुक निर्वासित भई बसेको बेला आयोजना गरेको रात्री भोजमा उ पनि थियो । धेरै कूदनैतिहरूलाई आमन्त्रण थियो । म पनि थिएँ । पार्दीको आकर्षण नै राजा सिहानुक स्वयं गाना गाउने आर्केस्द्रा सबै, साँढै रोमान्चकारी हुन्थ्यो । त्यहाँ रामले एउटा फ्रैन्च गाना गाएको थियो । सिहानुक धेरै प्रसन्न हुनु भएको थियो । देर रात्री सम्म चलेको उक्त पार्दीमा खाना पशि भएको नृत्यमा रामसँग राजकुमारी नाँचेको याद भयो । सब अचम्भित थिए । मलाई पनि नाच्च मन लागेको थियो तर धेरै संकोच भयो, नाचिन ।” मारियाले जसो इतिहासको सुखद पन्ना पढाएको मलाई अनुभव भयो ।

“त्यो राम म नै हुँ ।”

मारिया धेरै खुशी भई उनको पति पनि यी कुराहरू ध्यानले सुनिरहेका थिए । खुब रमाईलो माने ।

“तपाईंहरू पुरानो साथी रहे । खुशी लाग्यो ।”

मारिया खुशीले कराईन- “राम ! तिमि नै हो ?”

मेरो हाथ जोडले समातिन् र खुशी व्यक्त गरिन् ।

“एकलै आएको ? उषा मैदम खोइ ?”

“सन्चो नभएर नआएको” मैले बताएँ ।

हामी त्यहाँबाइ चिया/कफी खाएर फेरि बसमा चर्षि गन्तव्य तिर लाग्यौं । करिब एक बजे अपरान्ह ‘मार्सा माथु’ भन्ने स्थानमा बस पुग्यो । सबै ओर्लेर होइलमा आफ्नो समान राखी रेस्दुराँमा खाना खान पस्यौं । खाना खाई सकेपछि सबैको रुम्ने कार्यक्रम थियो । फातिमाले पुनः हामीसँग आएर रुम्न जान आग्रह गरिन् ।

गुप गुपमा सबै बाहिर निस्के । बाहिर सुन्दर उपवन जस्तो सौन्दर्यले भरिएको दृश्य सडकका पेइरहरूमा फुलेका फुलहरू र होइलको अर्को पट्टि विशाल मेडिदेरियन को निलो पानी र उठेका प्रालले मनलाई साह्रै आनन्दित तुल्यायो । तडकै प्रेउमा ठूलो भग्नावशेष थियो । फातिमाले बताइन् त्यो केलोपेद्रा महारानीको दरवार थियो, करिब दृजण वर्ष अर्षि र त्यसैको सामुन्ने ठूलो चट्टान थियो । बीचमा नहर जस्तै फुडेको सागरको पानी त्यहीबाइ अर्कोतिर बग्छ । त्यो ‘कैलोपेद्रा बाथ ढव’ हो । रानी सहेलीसँग नेचुरल ढवमा भित्र पसेर नुहाउने गर्थिन् । हामी पनि हेर्न गयौं त्यस बेला रुँदासम्म भित्र पानी थियो । यही स्थानमा जर्मनले दोश्रो विश्वयुडमा त्यहाँ आक्रमण गरि अड्डा जमाएको थियो । जर्मनी मिलिदरी म्युजियम पनि अवलोकन गर्थ्यौं । फातिमाले धेरै आर्कषक तरिकाले कैलोपेद्रा, सिकन्दर र दोश्रो विश्व युडको कथा सुनाउँदै साँभ हुनु अर्षि नै होइल हामीलाई पुग्यो । थाकेको हुनाले सबै फ्रेस हुन कोशमा गए । राती ड बजे फेरि वैक्वेइ हलमा दिनरका लागि सूचना गर्दै फातिमाले बिदा लिइन ।

रात्रीको खानामा सबै फेरि भेइ भए । साह्रै रमाइलो वातावरणमा हाँसै खाँदै पिउँदै सब गफिदै थिए । म पनि एउटा सिइमा आईबसें । संगीतको मधुर धुन बज्दै थियो । कति जोडी उठेर नाचन पनि थाले । म एकलै यसै बसि खाना खाएँ । मारिया र उनको पति अब्दुल्ला पनि सँगै देबुलमा बसे । सिकन्दर, केलोपेद्राकै कुरामा समय बित्यो । अब्दुला, पुरातत्व सम्बन्धित जानकार व्यक्ति थिए । हिन्दु धर्ममा पनि रूचि राख्ने भएकोले मसँग धेरै शिष्यता भयो । मारिया भने पहिले चीन मै काम गरेको हुनाले सामिप्यता देखाएकि थिइन् । खाना खाएर जाँदा जाँदै मारिया र अब्दुल्ला नृत्यमा सामेल भए । खुब रमाइलो लाग्यो । अब्दुल्ला थाकेपछि मारिया म नजिक आईन र भनिन् -

“राम ! आज त मसँग नाच्ने । चीनमा त नाचन पाएको थिइन ।” मैले शिष्यतापूर्वक धन्यवाद भनेर फेरि कुनै बेला अहिले थाकेको प्रु भनि आफ्नो असमर्थता जनाए । वास्तवमा म मनमनै दराएको थिए । “ल ! वाचा रट्यो । अर्को चोइ ।” भनि मारिया आफ्ना पति साथ गईन ।

भोली बिहान ड बजे सिवाका लागि प्रस्थान भएको हुनाले सबै समयमै उठेर खाजा खाई आफ्ना आफ्ना बैग सहित बसमा बसे । म पनि समयमा पुगेको थिएँ । जम्मा हामी घट्ट जना थियौं । ‘मार्सा माथु’ सिवाबाइ करिब तीन सय किलोमिडर पश्चिम लिवियाको बोर्डर नेर पर्थ्यो । सबै जना धेरै उत्साहित थिए । म भने औधि नै । किनभने यो मरुभूमि हो । यहाँ पिरामिड भन्दा अरू केहि बरि, प्रैन लाग्थ्यो । तैपनि मिश्रको सभ्यता परेको थिए । संसार मै सबभन्दा पुरानो र वैभावशाली भएको कुरा हेर्न मन लागि रहेको थियो । प्राकृतिक सौन्दर्यता हेर्दा युरोपका सुन्दर शहर जस्तै लाग्यो ‘मार्सा माथु’ । गुडवाइ भन्दै हामी आफ्नो यात्रा पुनः शुरू गर्थ्यो । जण बजेको थियो ।

मारियाको पति अब्दुल्ला मजाको मानिस मलाई लाग्यो । मुसलमान भए पनि हिन्दु धर्मको बारेमा उसको पान कुराकुरामै महशुस गरेको थिएँ । बसमा चढ्दा उनीहरू बसेकै सिधै संगै मलाई बस्न अनुरोध गर्यो ।

“गफ सफ गर्दै जाऊला, सजिलो हुन्छ ।” मारियाले पनि हाँस्दै भनि ।

बसले रफ्तार लिई सकेको थियो । बाहिरको नजारा अति सुन्दर शहर ५०० खजुरको रुखहरूका जंगल बीचबाध मरुभूमिको ५०० ५०० हामी जाँदै थियौं । अऊ अऊमा ऊँढको कारबाँ देखिन्थ्यो । क्याक्सका फुलबारीमा काँढाको फूल यस्तो मनोहारी हुन सक्छ मैले सोचेकै थिइन । जैतुनका रुखहरूको जंगल अर्कोपट्टि मलाई अचम्भित पारेको थियो ।

“कति ६९१ ५ ? मैले अब्दुल्लालाई सोधे ।

“तीन-चार सय किमी होला, अपरान्ह द्व-छ बजेसम्म पुग्याउँला ।” मारियाले जवाफ फर्काइन् ।

“राम ! तिम्रो नाऊ मलाई मनप्यो । हिन्दूको पूर्वजहरू नै अरबमा आईबसेका हुन् र यहाँको सभ्यता-वैभवता बसाएका हुन् ।” अब्दुल्लाले भने ।

“हो ! लाहोरमा रामका शोरा लव आएर बसेको हुनाले त्यो लाहोर नाऊँ प्यो । त्यहाँको पुरातत्व विभागले नै यो कुरा लेखेको ५ । फेरि महाभारतको युद्धमा, यमन, गान्धार (कन्धार) बाध राजाहरू आएर कौरवका पक्षमा लड्न आएको कुराहरू पढ्नु । यो कसरी भएको होला, मेरो मनमा ठूलो उत्सुकता रहेको ५ ।” मैले आफ्नो जिपासा अब्दुल्ला सामु राखे ।

अहिले अब्दुल्ला खुब जोडले हाँस्यो ।

“हा हा हा हा ! मेरो खोज र अध्ययन यसै विषयमा गरिरहेको ५ । तपाईंलाई केहि बताउँछु । सिवा नाऊँ शिवको नाऊमा पनि परेको हुन सक्छ । पौराणिक ग्रन्थ अनुसार ईलावर्त पहाडतिर नराम्रा मानिस (राक्षस) र हिमालय तिर राम्रा (देवता) हरूको बास थियो । हिस्ट्री अफ एशिया विश्व प्रसिद्ध पुस्तकमा लेखक साइक्सले राक्षसका गुरु शुक्राचार्य राजा बलिसँग असन्तुष भएर यही अरबमा करिब आफ्नो शोरा साथ दश वर्ष बसेका थिए । शुक्राचार्यको शोरको नाऊ ‘और्व’ थियो । उनकै नाऊले यो स्थानको नाऊ अरब रह्यो । शुक्राचार्य धुरन्धर कवि र काव्य लेखने भएको हुनाले उनको ख्याति र आदर यहाँ धेरै थियो । उनी बसेको अऊँमा आजभोली ‘कावा’ भनिन्छ । मुसलमानको लागि शुक्रवार पवित्र दिन शुक्राचार्यको काराले नै भएको हो । कावामा शिवलिंग थियो । शुक्राचार्य शिव भक्त थिए । त्यहि शिवलाई जल चसाउने र मन्दिरलाई शोग्ने सबैले गर्दथ्ये । आज पनि मुसलमान त्यहाँ पवित्र जल चसाउने र पिउने गर्दछन् । कावालाई शोग्ने र चुम्ने गर्दछन् ।”

म अब्दुल्लाको यस्तो पान देखेर ५क्क र मुग्ध भएको थिएँ । मैले खोजेकै कुरा उनले ५र्लङ्ग गरि बताए ।

“वाह ! वाह ! तपाईंको जानकारीले मलाई खुशी तुल्याएको ५ ।” मैले आभार व्यक्त गर्दै भने ।

“त्यति मात्र कहाँ हो र ! फराहो, मिश्रका शासक जसको सभ्यता, संस्कृति र वैभवता तथा उनका कलाकृति पुरातात्विक वैभवता आदि पनि हिन्दु संस्कार संगै मिल्दो जुल्दो थियो । उनीहरू पनि लवका सन्तानहरू नै थिए । सूर्यको उपासना, अग्नि पूजा, रिती तिथी सब सनातन धर्मसंगै मिल्दो रहेछ । त्यो

मिश्रको फराहो सभ्यताका भग्नावशेष ट-ठ हजार पुरानो पाईन्ड्र भने लवकुश पनि त्यस्तै समयमा पश्चिम दिशामा आएर राज्य गरेको भनिएको ५ । नेपाल भारतमा प्रमाणा पाइन्न तर साइक्सले सबै खोज गरी 'हिस्ट्री अफ एशिया' र 'हिस्ट्री अफ परसिया' मा राम्ररी वर्णन गरेका ५न् । 'हिस्ट्री अफ परसिया' मा भने साइक्सले बेविलोनको गुफामा द्व-छ हजार वर्ष पुरानो भित्तामा चित्रहरू कुँदिएको बताएका ५न् जसमा भगवान विष्णुले हिरण्यकस्यपुका भाई हिरण्यक्ष संग यु४ गरेको सब वर्णन ५ । यसले यो कुरामा बल मिल् कि लवकुश पश्चिम दिशामा आएर अरबमा राज्य साम्राज्य बशाए र सभ्यता र वैभवतामा वृ४ गरे । यसमा अझ धेरै खोजको आवश्यकता ५ ।" अब्दुल्लाले लामो साँस लिए । साँचै भनुँ भने मलाई अब्दुला मुसलमान होइन, हिन्दु हुनुपर्ने मानिस लाग्यो । मेरो पानको सिमा त्यहाँ थाह भयो । मनमनै म नतमस्तक भए ।

बस द्रुत गतिले मरुभूमिको क्षातीबाद् अर्इ बर्शरहेको थियो र बसभित्र मधुर संगीतका धुन बजिरहेको थियो । सारा यात्रीहरू प्रशन्न भएर दृश्य हेर्दै, गफिदै रमाएका थिए । शायरा भ्यालतिर मजाले निदाइसकेकी थिइन् । हामी साँचै चार बजे सिवामा प्रवेश गर्नुँ ।

वाह ! सिवा ! अजिवको अर्ऊँ । खजुर, जैतुन, फूलवारी ऊँदका काफिला । लोग्ने मानिस ढाउकोमा सेतो पगडी र पुरा जिउमा 'गलवैया' (खुट्टा सम्म शोप्ने एउडै कुर्ता) लगाएर खेतवारी, ररमा काम गरिरहेको सानो बजार । महिलाहरू मुखमा नकाव, शिर कालो कपडाले शोपेको र बुर्का (कालै कुर्ता) पाऊ सम्म लगाएका ।

मादाका ररहरू मानौँ दश हजार वर्ष पुरानो युगमा प्रवेश हामीले गरेका थियौँ । ररको भित्ताहरूमा फराहोका विभिन्न प्रकारका समयका स्थिति दर्शाउने फोद्देहरू बनाइएको थियो । बसबाद् नै यस्तो दृश्य देखेर म निककै अचम्भित भएको थिए ।

बस विस्तारै रिसोद् एरियामा प्रवेश गर्दै थियो । धेरै रिसोद्हरू किलोमिद्दरसम्म बनेका थिए । त्यहाँ विदेशी पर्यद्कहरूको चहलपहल देखियो । हाम्रो बस 'इको रिसोद्' साल्द रौक मा रोकियो । सारा मानिस ओर्लेर रिसेप्सनमा बसे । फातिमा अब धेरै सक्रिय भएकी थिइन् । सबैलाई क्याक्दसको फूल हाथमा दिइन् र 'कहवा स्पेशल' खजुर हालेर बनाएको पेय पिउन आग्रह गरिन् । हामी सबै थाकेका थियौँ । कहवा (कफी) ले एकदम आनन्द दियो र ताजगी पनि ।

फातिमा हामी सबैलाई 'मद्द साल्द रक' ले बनेको पारम्पारिक एक तल्ले स-सानो ररको नम्बर दिइन् । साँचो कतै पनि प्रैन । सब खुल्ला । पुरा आजादी जस्तो कि फराहोको जमानामा थियो । रर भित्र पनि मादाका भाँडा तर राम्रो । बिजुली बत्ती नभएको । रिसोद्को चोक चोकमा मशाल बालेको । मेरो मन अत्यन्त खुशी भईरहेको थियो । प्रेउमा 'वोसिस' ङ्लो पोखरी, त्यहाँ परम्परागत तरिका फराहो जमानाका मानिसले लुगा बनाउने, बाँसका समान बनाउने, पानीमा माश्रा समाउन जाल हाल्दै थिए । पर खजुरको बोद्दमुनि एक नवयुवति पुरानो कनून (हार्प) बाध्ययन्त्र बजाउँदै थिइन् । यो रिसोद् पूर्व र पश्चिम दुई भागमा थियो । हामी सबै पश्चिम रिसोद्मा थियौँ । फातिमाले हाम्रो मोवाईल त्यहि रिसेप्सनमा राख्न लगाइन् । केहि परे कागजमा लेखेर मेसेज सेविकाहरूबाद् कोअ कोअमा पठाउने । अचम्मको प्रकृतिवास थियो ।

फातिमाले सबैलाई लामो सफरका लागि धन्यवाद दिइन् र म नजिक आएर केहि चाहिएमा भन्नु भन्दै हाँसिन । अनि फेरि साँझ सात बजे नेफरतिती हलमा खानलाई जम्मा हुने । नाचगान मधुरो तरिकाले गर्न सकिन्छ भन्न बताईन । मैले देखें सबै राजदूतहरू र महिलाहरू धेरै उत्साहित थिए र साँझ सात बजे भेङ्ने भनेर आ-आफ्ना स-साना माझका साल्द रक इरमा पसे ।

साँझ सात बजे विस्तारै विस्तारै सबै कूद्नीतिक जोडिहरू राम्रा राम्रा नाच्ने लुगामा जमेर नेफर तिती हलमा जम्मा हुन थाले । म पुग्दा धेरै आईसकेका थिए । मारिया पनि मोरोक्कन नाच्ने लुगामा एकलै बसेकी थिइन् । मलाई देखेपछि आफ्नो देबुलमा मलाई आउने इशारा गरिन् । त्यस देबुलमा एउटा महिला पनि थिइन् । म गएर बसें ।

“राम ! यो इसावेल हुन् । तिमीलाई खोज्दै थिइन् ।” मारियाले मलाई त्यो महिलासँग परिचय गराइन् । मैले त्यो सुन्दरी महिलासँग हाथ मिलाए र भने

“मेरो नाउं राम हो । म नेपालबाद् आएको हुँ ।”

“तपाईं फ्रान्समा भिसीमा परेको हो ?” इशावेलले सोधिन ।

“अँ ! त्यहाँ भाषा परेको हुँ । किन ?”

“नेपालबाद् राजदूत आएको लिष्मा हेरे र राम नाम देखे पछि तपाईं नै हो कि भनेर भेङ्गन आएकी । म यस रिसोर्दको व्यवस्थापक हुँ । स्पेनिस कम्पनीले चलाएको यो सानो रिसोर्द हो । तपाईंले मलाई विर्सनु भयो । तर मैले तपाईंलाई विर्सन सकेको छैन, म पनि त्यहि परेको हुँ । तपाईंले मलाई गरेको मरत विर्सको छैन । तपाईं अहिले पनि उस्तै हाँसिलो र मित्रवत हुनुहुन्छ ।”

त्यति सुनेपछि मलाई पनि करिब वीस वर्षको पुरानो हलुका याद आयो । हो भन्दै म हाँसेर हात जोडले मिलाएँ । “खुशी लाग्यो । धेरै खुशी लाग्यो यसरी यो वियावान रेगिस्तानमा पुरानो सहपाथी भेङ्गु । अब हामी पत्र व्यवहार गरौला । म पनि त्यो क्षण विर्सको छैन जब हाम्रो भाषा सिखाउने ‘काभिलाम’ मा रात्री भोज र नाच्ने कार्यक्रम हुँदा मलाई नाच्न आउदैन् थियो र तपाईंले मेरो हात समाती सँगसँगै फ्लोर मा नाच्न सिकाउनुभयो ।” म अतीतमा दुबेर गए ।

“अनि याद छ ? तपाईं नाच्न नजानेर मेरो खुट्टा कुल्चेर लड्नु भएको ? सारा साथीहरू कति मजाक गरेर हाँसेका थिएँ ।” इशावेल भावुक भईन् ।

“लौ आज खाना पछि तपाईं सँग म एक छिन नाच्न आउछु ।” इशावेल त्यति भनेर अर्को ग्रुपमा केहि कुरा गर्न गईन् ।

मैले मारिया तिर हेरेँ । यति वेरसम्म म इशावेलसँग नै कुरामा हराएको थिए । मारिया शान्त र उदास जस्तो लागिन ।

“के भो मारिया ?” मैले उसको हात समातेर हल्लाए ।

“केही होइन् । म धेरै सपना हेर्ने मानिस हुँ । सपना सपना नै हुन्छ ।” लामो साँस लिएर मारिया भनिन् ।

अव्दूला यहि बीच दुपलुक्क आई पुगे ।

“के गफ भई रहे ? नाच्ने प्रोग्राम मिलाएको हो ?

मारिया तिमी चीनमा नाच्ने इक्षा रामसँगै आज यहि पुरा गरि हाल्नु । हा हा हा हा । क्या रमाईलो अउँ यो । धेरै महँगो ५ नत्र म धेरै समय यही अउँमा बस्थे । मलाई साह्रै मन पच्यो ।”

“मलाई पनि ।” मलाई सिवासँग मानौ प्रेम बन्दै गईरहेको थियो । के थियो सिवामा ? मलाई तान्या तान्यै ।

नेफरतिती हलमा संगीतको धुन विस्तारै बज्दै थियो । खाना खाएपछि सबै नाच्नमा लागे । इशावेल र मारियासँग पालैपालो म केहि बेर नाचे । पछि एउटा फ्रेन्च गीत पनि गाएँ । उन्माद र आनन्द बीच फराहोको अकल्पनीय शान्तिले वातावरणलाई मादक बनाएको थियो । राती जण बजे तिर कार्यक्रम सकेर सबै आफ्ना स्थानमा सुत्न गए । जाँदा जाँदै उदास देखिएकी मारिया गुदनाईई भन्दै अब्दूलासँग हात समातेर आफ्ना कोअतिर लागिन् ।

भोली पल्ड बिहान आ७ बजे सबै जना दुई खामुन रेष्टुराँमा खाजा खान पुगे । म पुग्दा त्यहाँ केहि अफ्रिकन, युरोपियन, दक्षिण अमेरिकन राजदूतहरू र उनका मैदमहरूलाई देखे ।

“सलाम वालेकुम, सवाह खैर ?” अब्दूलालाई बिहानको अभिवादन गरेँ ।

“सफिर ! वालेकुम सलाम”, अब्दूलाले प्रफुल्ल मुद्रामा हात मिलायो ।

मारियालाई त्यहाँ नदेखे पछि मैले सोधे ।

“अलि कपाल दुखेकोले शिलो आउछिन् । हामी नास्ता गरौं ।” अब्दुला र म सर्बिग देबुलतिर गयौं । त्यहाँ विभिन्न किसिमका स्थानीय खाने कुरा प्रायः सबै गहुँको पिअे, फलफूल, ओलीभ र खजुरबाद निर्मित थिए । तबसम्म मारिया पनि आईन र हामीसँग खाना लिन थालिन । उनलाई स्थानीय खानाको पान थियो । मलाई सबै बताउन थालिन् ।

“गुद मर्निङ्ग मारिया, अहिले कस्तो ?”

“अिकै ५ । तर तिमी हिजो इशावेलसँग राम्ररी नाचेका थियौं ?”

“तिमीसँग पनि त नाचेको थिएँ ।” म अचम्भित हुँदै भने ।

खाना लिएर हामी देबुलमा बसे ।

“राम ! हेर कचौरामा । यसको नाउँ ओम अली हो । चाख त ।” अब्दुलले एउटा कचौरा मेरो अगाडि गच्यो । मैले चाखे । हाम्रो खीर जस्तै दुधमा पकाएको परिकार थियो । “यो फराहोको स्वीड दीस हो । यहाँ चामल पहिले नभएको हुनाले पिअेको चामल जस्तो बनाएर दुधमा पकाएको । यो हिन्दु खाना जस्तै ५ । अनि उता हे ७लो मूर्ति ! त्यो यहाँको तीन चार हजार वर्ष पहिले राज्य गरेको राजा रामासिस ।

“के ?” म अचम्भित भए ।

“हो । यहाँ धेरै कुरा हिन्दु नाऊसँग मिल्छ । उनी सूर्यका उपासक, जल, थल, वायु सबैलाई देउता मान्ने फराहो राजा थिए । हुन सक्छ फराहो लवकुश अरबमा आएर आफ्ना राज्य गरे र पछि उनका सन्तान विस्तारै विस्तारै यतैका भए आफ्ना पुराना मूल्य मान्यतालाई अलि अलि भए पनि बचाए राखेको हुन सक्छ ।”

यसै बीच फातिमा, हाम्रो गाईद, आई पुगिन र सबैलाई अमुन देम्पल र शाली महल सभ्यताको खोचहर हेर्न जाने कार्यक्रम बताईन । सारे नौ बजे सबै जना बसमा चरेर सिवा बस्ती हुँदै अमुन देम्पल तिर लाग्यौ ।

फातिमाले बताईन सिवामा अमून देम्पल बारे । करिब पाँच हजार वर्ष पहिले मिश्रको फराहोबाद निर्माणा गरिएको हो । सिवाको ससाना पहाडीमाथि बनाएको यो विख्यात सूर्य मन्दिर हो जहाँ मिश्रको नयाँ सम्राट् (फराहो) हुनु अरि यहाँ राजाबाद सूर्यलाई पूजा अर्चना गरि र विशेष वस्त्र धारणा गरि मन्दिरको प्राङ्गोबाद तल उभिरहेका जनतालाई आज देखि म मिश्रको नयाँ फराहो हुँ भनि शेषणा गर्ने अत्यन्त महत्वपूर्ण स्थान हो ।

मेरो मनमस्तिष्कमा फेरि फराहो र सनातन धर्म रुम्न थाल्यो । सूर्यको उपासना गर्ने, सूर्य मन्दिर, एक बिहान आएर पूजा गर्ने र राजा भएको शेषणा गर्ने सबै हाम्रो विधिहरू जस्तो लाग्न थाल्यो । बिहानीको सूर्य अर्थात् अरुण । हुन सक्छ यो अरुण देम्पल हो पश्चि अपभ्रंस भएर अमून देम्पल भएको होला । मलाई विस्तारै विस्तारै सनातन र फराहो सभ्यताको जरा हाम्रै धर्म, संस्कृति र त्रेता युग पश्चिको सम्बन्ध हुनेमा धेरै नै विश्वास बस्यो । म त्यो मन्दिर हेर्न धेरै आतुर भएँ ।

बस विस्तारै अमुन देम्पलको क्षेत्रमा रोकियो । हामी सबै ओर्लियौ । फ्रेंच एम्बेसदर पनि पहिला चोर्दि आएको हुनाले म जस्तै अचम्भित थिए । उनी म नजिक आए र भने-“एम्बेसदर ! तपाईंले हिजो गाएको फ्रेंच गीत मलाई धेरै मन पयो । मेरो धेरै मन पर्ने गीत हो त्यो । कहाँबाद यस्तो राम्रो सिक्नु भयो ?”

“म तपाईं कै देशमा पसेको र पश्चि आफ्नो राजदूतावासमा काम पनि गरेको”, मेरो कुरा सुनेर फ्रेंच राजदूत एकदम खुशी भयो र मसँगै फ्रेंचमै कुरा गर्दै विस्तारै पहाडी माथि चर्न थाल्यो । म यताउता जिपाशाले हेर्दै थिए । पश्चिबाद अब्दुला र मारिया पनि आउँदै थिए ।

“कसलाई खोजेको राम ? इशावेल यो कार्यक्रममा आउदिनन् ।” मारियाले मलाई लक्षित गरेर भनिन् ।

“होइन । म त यहाँ फराहोको इतिहास, ऽज्ञा, पर्खाल सबैमा हेर्दै छु ।” म अमुन देम्पलमा वशिभूत भएर माथि उक्लिदै थिएँ । करिब आधा इन्चामा माथि पुगे । मन्दिर भग्नावशेष देखेर अचम्भित भए । भित्तामा धेरै तस्वीर बनाएका र अरबी भाषामा यस मन्दिर र फराहोको वर्णन गरेको ५ भनि फातिमा बताउँदै थिइन् । म पनि उभेर सबै सुन्न थाले ।

फातिमाले एकदम चाख लाग्दो कुरा बताईन कि इशा भन्दा सारे तिन सय वर्ष पहिले सिकन्दर महानले मिश्र जिते तर पश्चि धेरै सशक्त थिए । यहाँका जनताले उनलाई स्वीकार गर्नुन या गर्दैनन् तै पनि हिम्मत गरेर परम्परा अनुसार अमुन देम्पलमा आई सूर्यको पूजा अर्चना गरि आफुलाई ‘आज देखि म मिश्रको फराहो हुँ’ भनि शेषणा गरे । जनताले करतल ध्वनीले स्वीकारे । वास्तवमा सिकन्दरलाई धेरै नै मनपर्ने मिश्र देश र यसको सभ्यता थियो । एलेक्जेन्ड्रिया भूमध्य सागर तटमा बसेको शहर सिकन्दरकै नाऊमा ५ । उनको मृत्युपरान्त उनको चिहान कहाँ ५ अफ्र यकिन साथ कोहीले भन्न सकेको छैन । कोहि एलेक्जेन्ड्रियामा भन्नु भने कोहि यही तल सिवामा ५ भन्नु ।

म इतिहासमा दुबैको जस्तो अनुभव गरे र फातिमाको पछि पछि लागे । फ्रेंच एम्बेस्डर पनि मसँग पछि पछि आए । पहाडी तल गए पछि बसबाद जङ्गल-दृष्य मिनेद पछि सिकन्दरलाई गाढेको अऊँमा पुगियो । फातिमाले त्यो सुन्दर चिहानमा रोकिन । यही सिकन्दरको मकबरा हो । उखननका कार्य भई रहेको थियो । अझ प्रमाणात गर्न नयाँ नयाँ प्रमाणा खोजि भई रहेको थियो । फातिमाले यसको महत्व बताउँदै भनिन- “सन् जङ्गल मा सिकन्दरको यो चिहान ग्रीसकी पुरातत्व विशेषज्ञ मैडम लिउना साउलात्वीले पत्ता लगाए पछि सारा संसारको ध्यान सिवा तिर आकर्षित भयो र पर्यटक धेरै आउन थाले ।”

भीडभाडमा हामी पनि भित्र पस्यौं । सैकदो पर्यटकहरू अचम्मित भई दृश्यावलोकन गर्दै थिए । अबूला र मारियाले मसँग पनि त्यहाँ फोडो खिचाए । भ्रमणको क्रममा फातिमाले मिश्रको अन्तिम फराहो एक जना महिला भएको बताइन् । कैलोपेद्रा जसको दरवारको भग्नावशेष हामी मार्सामा थुमा हेरेका थियौं र जो समुन्द्रमा चट्टान भित्र पसेर स्नान गर्थिन् । कैलोपेद्रा विस्मयकारी सुन्दरताकी महारानी थिइन् । ग्रीस र इज्राएलीका शासकहरू पनि कैलोपेद्राका दिवाना थिए भनेर फातिमाले बताइन् । कैलोपेद्राले पनि मिश्रको रानी फराहो बन्दा आमन देम्पलमा गएर आफुलाई शेषणा गरेकी थिइन् । तर आश्चर्य ५ कैलोपेद्राको चिहान पनि आज सम्म फेला परेको छैन ।

फातिमा र फ्रेंच एम्बेसदर कुरा गर्दै थिए । फातिमाले एडा रेस्दुराँमा बस रोकिन र सबैले त्यही लन्च खाने व्यवस्था गरिन् । लन्च खाएर सब थाकेका जस्तै देखिन्थ्यो । मलाई अझ हेर्ने उत्साह थियो । त्यहाँबाद हामी ‘गार्वेल अल मौत’ अर्थात् मृत्युको पहाडमा गयौं त्यहाँ सिवामा मरेका सबै राजा र उला भारदारका चिहान थियो । त्यहाँको छ हजार वर्षको इतिहास फातिमाले बताइन् । त्यही पहाडीबाद पर शाली पुराना शहरको भग्नावशेष प्रस्द देखिन्थ्यो । सबै साल्द रक माझका बनेका पहाडीमा स्थित अनगिन्ती भग्नावशेष अफ्रिकन राजदूतहरू त्यो हेरेर दंग परिरहेका थिए । यी पुरातात्विक सम्पदाहरू अक्षेमन र जर्मन आक्रमणबाद धेरै पुरातात्विक वस्तुहरू ध्वस्त भएका थिए । यी सबै अऊँको भ्रमण गर्दा गर्दै पाँच बजेको थियो । फातिमाले आजको दुर शाली शहरको भग्नावशेष भ्रमण पछि समाप्त गरिन् र आफ्नो होटलमा फर्किन् ।

“कस्तो लाग्यो राम !” मारियाले मलाई सोधिन् ।

“म मुग्ध भएको ५ । इतिहाससँग मिलाएर यो अऊँ हेर्दा यसको भव्यता, वैभव र पराक्रमको कल्पना गर्न सक्छु । अब मलाई क्लेयोपेद्रा बारेमा जान्न धेरै मन लागेको ५ ।” मैले आफ्नो मनको कुरा बताए ।

“हो ! म पनि, अचम्मको साम्राणी, कुदनीति, राजनीति र सुन्दरताकी धनी थिइन क्लेयोपेद्रा । अन्तमा आफ्नु मृत्यु सर्पले ढोकाएर गरिन् भन्ने कुरामा मलाई अझै पत्यार लाग्दैन मिश्रको सुन्दरताकी महारानीले यस्तो गरेकोले मनमा नराम्रो लाग्छ ।” मारिया उदास भईन् । रोमनले मिश्रमा हमला गरेर हराएको थाह पाएर क्लेयोपेद्राले आफ्नु अन्त गर्नुपन्थ्यो ।

बस हाम्रो रिसोर्टमा आईपुगेको थियो । फातिमा फेरि उभिन र भनिन् “भोली हामी सधै जस्तो आउ बजे नास्ता गरेर बाँसेमा पर्ने बाँकी हेर्ने अऊँमा दृश्यावलोकन गर्न जाने र उतैबाद कायरो प्रस्थान गर्ने ।” सबै जना स्कूलका विद्यार्थी जस्तै कुरा मानेर आ-आफ्ना स्थान तिर लागे ।

भोली पल्द विहान ५ बजे तिर मेरो कोअ बाहिर इशावेल आएर मलाई बोलाइन् । म बाहिर आए । “म भित्र आउन सक्छु ।” इशावेलले हाँसै सोधिन । उनको हातमा कुनै उपहारका पैकेङ्ग जस्तै थियो । मैले उनलाई भित्र बोलाए । उनले मलाई त्यो उपहार दिइन् र अभिनन्दन गरिन् ।

“तिमी एकदम बदलेको प्रैनौ राम । उस्तै प्रौ । तिमी किन यस्तो ?” इशावेल भावुक भएकी थिइन् । म बीचलित भएँ ।

“जीवन हो । यस्तै हो । तिमी कायरो आउँदा हाम्रो राजदूतावासमा अवश्य आउनु । तिमीलाई भेदे पप्रि मलाई धेरै राम्रो लाग्नेप्र ।

इशावेल केहि नबोलिकन आँखा पुप्रुदै बाहिरिन र भनिन् “फेरि भेदेँला राम ! ईश्वरले तिम्रो रक्षा गरुन् ।” मेरो मनमा पनि किन हो किन इशावेल प्रति दया उत्पन्न भयो । सम्भके दृछ वर्ष पहिले उनी फ्रांसको गाऊमा पप्रुन आउँदा कति भयभित थिइन् र मैले कसरी यिनलाई रक्सी खाएको मानिसबाद् बचाएको थिएँ ।

नुहाई धुवाईकन म बाहिर आ७ बजे रेस्दुराँमा पसे । सारा मानिस खुशीसाथ खाना शुरू गरिरहेका थिए । म पनि साविक जस्तै अब्दूला र मारिया बसेको देबुलमा गए ।

“गुद मर्निङ्ग ! कस्तो बित्यो रात ?” मैले अब्दूला र मारियालाई अभिवादन गरेँ ।

‘म त क्लेयोपेद्रा बारे नै सोचिरहे ।’ मारियाले भनिन् । फातिमा आएर आज ज्ञ इन्दा सिवा नजिक समुन्द्र भन्दा करिब साधे फिद् तल भएको रेगिस्तान, वोसिस, खजुर, ओलीभ भएको फुलवारीमा लाने प्रिन् । यो संसारकै अद्भूत स्थान हो । समुन्द्र भन्दा तल, फलफूल फल्ने अऊ । त्यहाँको खजुर र ओलिभ संसार प्रसि४ प्र र धेरै महँगो प्र ।” अब्दूलाले सबै सूचना दिए ।

हामी चाँदै नास्ता गरिकन तैयार भयौँ । त्यसैवेला फातिमा आइपुगिन र सबैलाई लिएर नौ बजे प्रस्थान गरिन् ।

आधा इन्दामा हामी समुन्द्र सतह भन्दा तलको रेगिस्तानमा पुग्यौँ । नाम मात्रको मरुभूमि । चारैतिर हरियाली, पोखरी, फूल, विरुवा, चराचुरुङ्गी र खजुर एवं ओलिभको हजारौँ रुखहरू । त्यहाँ चिया पनि फेरि खाँयौँ केहि खजुर र ओलिभ पनि चाख्यौँ । अन्य राजदूतहरूले दर्जन पाकेद् खरिद गरेका होलान् । मै ले द्द-घ पाकेद् खरिद गरे । मूल्य साढे चर्को थियो । तर खजुर भने संसार मै नपाउने राजशी स्वादको थियो ।

मारियाले खुब खरिदारी गरिन् । अब्दूला एकदम रमाएका थिए । वताए त्यहाँबाद् पश्चिमको भाग लिविया हो र त्यहाँबाद् अलि उता उसको देश मोरोक्को पर्दप्र । मोरोक्कोका मानिस एकदम राम्रा र दिलदार हुन्प्र भन्ने कुरा मैले फ्रांसमा पप्रुदा थाहा पाएको थिएँ ।

बस यात्रा फेरी शुरू भयो । फातिमा आइन् र अब बस कायरो तर्फ रवाना हुन्प्र । राती ढ बजेतिर पुगिन्प्र होला । बाधेमा खाना खाने र समयको पावन्दी राख्ने भनि सल्लाह दिइन् । हाम्रो यात्रा यसै प्रकार द्रुत गतिले शुरू भई द्रुत गतिमा नै अन्त भयो । बाधेमा द्द बजे खाना खाँयौँ र यात्रा फेरि शुरू भयो । धेरै बसमा सुतिसकेका थिए । म पनि सुतेको थिए ।

“उ७ राम ! उ७ !” भनि अब्दूलाले उआएपछि थाह पाएँ कायरो आईसकेको थियो । सबले फातिमालाई धन्यवाद र उपहार पनि दिए । फेरि फेरि भेद होला भनि सबै विदावारी हुँदै थिए । मैले पनि फातिमालाई अद्भूत स्थान देखाएको र कुशल गाइद भएकोले बधाई दिएँ । तल हेरे मेरो ट्राइभर आइसकेको थियो र उ मेरो सुदकेश निकालेर कारमा राख्दै थियो ।

“खुदा हाफिज राम !” अब्दूलाले हाथ मिलाउँदै भने । मारिया चुप चाप हेर्दै थिइन् । गम्भीर थिइन् । उनीहरूले जाँदा जाँदै अभिवादन गरे ।

“राम ! तिमी अहिले पनि उस्तै लाग्छौ । तिमी किन यस्तो ? यहाँ तिमीलाई दिनरमा निम्त्याउछु । परिवार सहित आउनु है !”

“हाम्रो भेद भई रहन्छ चिन्ता नगर ।” मैले हात मिलाउँदै भने ।

अब्दूला र मारिया आफ्ना कारमा बसी आफ्ना निवास तर्फ लागे । म पनि आफ्नो निवास तिर लागे । तर सिवाको मनोरम दृश्य, पुरातात्विक सम्पदा, सनातन र अमुन देम्पलको सामिप्यता, निर्दोष जनजीवन सिकंदर र क्लेयोपेट्राका बर्णन, खजुरका जंगल र ऊँदका काफिलाले त्यहि नै मेरो मन बसिराख्यो । सिवामा पुरानो मित्रहरूसँगको भेदशेदले जीवनमा फेरी नयाँ उमंग थपेको थियो । आज सम्म पनि मेरा कानहरूमा सिवाको सुनसान रोगस्तानको हावामा फराहो र सनातन सभ्यताका गीत संगीतले आफुतिर आर्कषित गरिरहेको हुन्छ । सिवासंग यो कस्तो रोमान्स हो मैले आज सम्म बुझ्न सकिन !

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## Some Observations on Diplomacy



- *Ramesh Prasad Khanal*<sup>1</sup>

Diplomacy is construed as one of the major statecrafts of which trajectory of success and failure create history in the world. Consequently, in many instances, it has become leading cause for the rise and fall of empires or regimes in different phases of world history. Diplomacy consists of state-of-art skills developed over the ages through continuous practises between and among the states that are generally blended with precedents, rules and norms as well as experiences. In order to interact, negotiate and resolve issues peacefully among states/one ruler to another, diplomacy has evolved with the geographical locations, changing times, events and technology. The key to successful diplomacy is to effectively communicate, negotiate and resolve issues in an amicable way keeping all sides happy or at least satisfied. When diplomacy fails, issues on hand may turn into violent conflicts, if not checked on time. This failure was visible during the two World Wars between 1914-1918 and 1941-1945 respectively.

As long as there are interests, nations tend to claim their “legitimate right” to defend their claims over interests. Since 1946, after the end of the 2nd World War, nations have strived to choose peaceful means to preserve and promote their respective national interests. The multilateral and regional mechanisms are also used to pursue their agendas through negotiation and peaceful means. Despite efforts through such mechanisms, the world has been experiencing armed conflicts and wars in several parts of the globe. As expected after the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and so called “end of history”, a peaceful world with equality, dignity and human rights is still elusive.

Intractable issues are addressed by diplomats through the art and skill inherent to diplomacy. In order to arm diplomats with necessary skills, states heavily invest in diplomatic mechanisms, help sharpen apparatus and develop skillful human resources to keep it updated to face emerging challenges either through bilateral or multilateral mediums. With tactful engagement and personal involvement, diplomats could play a very crucial role in bringing many derailed negotiations to the right track. As Defense personnel defend national borders with their blood and sweat, diplomats do the same albeit in a subtle way through innumerable engagements and negotiations, sometimes too tiring, sometimes too irritating and sometimes seemingly far-fetched ones to preserve their national interests.

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<sup>1</sup> *Former Ambassador of Nepal to Germany (2016-2020) and Chief of Protocol (2015-2016).*

Diplomats are regarded as “warriors without a uniform”. They are trained in such a way to deal with issues in a disciplined manner, keeping in sync with time, place and purposes. Diplomatic service, therefore, is treated as a “special service” by states around the world. Diplomats are trained and groomed in a rigorous way to face challenges of unforeseen events and issues emerging or making predictions on future course of actions with options for the concerned state to choose. In the absence of knowledge on the significance of diplomacy and works of diplomats, many tend to criticise that such institutions are “white elephants” with no tangible outcome. By its nature, diplomacy generally carried out quietly to garner better results. Pursuance of quiet diplomatic endeavours brings in tangible outcome than cacophonous diplomacy which mars the very core of diplomacy to make it a win-win situation for all sides.

Being a “special service”, diplomatic works should be carried out by specially trained personnel. If an untrained and inexperienced personnel is sent to the battleground, it is certain that one will lose the battle. In our context, if Nepal keeps sending untrained, inexperienced personnel to man a diplomatic mission, expecting the desired result is far-fetched. Only a diplomat, laden with necessary skills, knowledge and experiences would be able to work out a 'win-win' at the negotiation table either at the bilateral, multilateral or regional level.

Diplomacy, therefore, is and should be carried out by the “diplomatic cadres” to garner maximum benefits to one’s states. Persuading one’s position to the other party to come to an agreement is actually a herculean task due to complexities arising from conflicting interests of each party. Diplomacy is an art of persuasion and negotiation. In diplomacy, one has to lead, stir and persevere. Diplomats are problem-solvers and crisis managers. They should lead, they should inspire and they should shed their blood and sweat for preservation and promotion of mutual interests on an equitable basis.

Diplomacy is sometimes ridiculed as “half protocol, half alcohol” but far from it, in practice, it is an arduous process to maximise national interests through relentless efforts and tiring negotiations that involves, among other, exchange of substantive agendas to each other. Perseverance, persuasion and relentless efforts are hallmarks of diplomacy. States possess different capabilities called by eminent scholar Hans J Morgenthau as “power”. Such powers mainly vary according to geography, population and economy among others. But, in international forums such as the UN, each state holds a sovereign voting right irrespective of the size, location, population or size of economy of a state. Influential powers in international affairs wish to push forward their interests through lesser powerful states. In order to safeguard national interests, smaller countries with “less power” should keep themselves ready to negotiate with “big power” on equal terms. Diplomacy is the only effective tool for “smaller powers” to navigate in the complex networks of international affairs. They have no choice but to keep engaged and strive to defend their interests. Diplomacy means much more to “smaller powers” as it keeps sharpening their skills and acumen to sit face to face with bigger powers at the negotiating table.”

Diplomacy is and should, therefore, be handled by diplomatic professionals who are well-acquainted with necessary diplomatic skills, experiences and wisdom developed over the years and networks established during their diplomatic tenure abroad. With required diplomatic paraphernalia, experienced diplomats tend to sail the boat smoothly even during storms at the unpredictable sea. Merely heading a diplomatic mission does not necessarily bestow upon the much-needed skills, wisdom and experiences. Being a 'special service', diplomatic service should be predominantly handled by professionals who have devoted their life in this profession. Projection, prediction and factual assessment of the situation and issues are major attributes of a professional diplomat. Smaller countries and economies should, therefore, give much priority to enhance the competence of its diplomatic professionals. Diplomacy is not everybody's cup of tea as assumed. In order to not to face setbacks, diplomatic professionals could play pivotal roles in safeguarding national interests. Every trained/groomed professional diplomat is regarded as an asset to the respective states and their experiences and expertise are well-received and utilized in time of need.

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## OBITUARIES

### **In Memory of Two Senior Diplomats: Narendra Bikram Shah and Indra Bahadur Singh**



*Dr. Madan Kumar Bhattarai<sup>1</sup>*

I extend sincere thanks to AFCAN President Ambassador Dr Rambhakta Thakur for asking me to write something to pay tributes to two of our career professionals, possibly taking cue from my last write-up in memory of three senior diplomats who successively headed the AFCAN with distinction. This also reminds of the directive given to me on August 31, 1977 by our boss, Mana Ranjan Josse, to write an obituary for Prince Basundhara Pratap Bir Bikram Shah, the first such act on my part. This possibly prompted Rishikesh Shaha to ask me to do likewise for his wife, Siddhanta Shaha, as he seemed to have been informed by another boss of ours, Barun Shumshere, of our first obituary. Our tributes to both Rishikesh Shaha and Barun Shumshere who loved us so much.

Coming to our topic, we are very sad to lose two career diplomats within a period of barely three weeks in May 2021. As members of Nepal's Foreign Service, they helped a lot in projecting Nepal's better image abroad in addition to contributing profusely in their assignments at headquarters. As one to have worked closely with both of them at headquarters and getting professional advice even privately, this humble self has tried



to express his own impressions of them limited as they may be as there was no occasion to work together with them in any mission except accompanying top dignitaries on some state and official visits with Shah as Foreign Secretary and Singh as Chief of Protocol.

#### **Narendra Bikram Shah**

Narendra Bikram Shah (December 30, 1939 – May 8, 2021) joined the diplomatic service in 1961 after coming out first in the combined civil service examinations. A brilliant student at school, college and university levels, Shah completed his Masters degree in History. During his

*1 Ambassador to Germany (2004-2009), Foreign Secretary (2009-2011), Ambassador to Japan (2011-2015) and Foreign Policy Adviser to President of Nepal (2016-2018)*

three and half decade-long association with the Nepal Foreign Service, Shah was posted in New Delhi, Washington DC and New York before being asked to become Nepal's Ambassador to the Russian Federation. He holds the distinction of serving as Nepal's Foreign Secretary for the longest period from 1985 to 1992. He was later given post-retirement assignment as Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

Narendra Bikram Shah and his elder brother Gobardhan Bikram Shah alias Dhana Bikram Shah served in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs almost together since their entry in 1961 until 1992 when both of them were summarily snapped of the umbilical cord of bureaucracy when the government suddenly amended the civil service rules to make a point blank decision to terminate the services of over six thousand civil servants who had served for thirty years on a compulsory basis and even twenty years on ad-hoc manner, a move taken as a single step to undermine the very morale and sanctity of bureaucracy that has probably never recovered.

Grandson of Yakshya Bikram Shah Dhamala and son of Chuda Bikram Shah, Narendra Bikram Shah with his more popular family name, Rameshwar Bikram Shah, is in the personal evaluation of this humble self, one of the nine jewels of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who helped supervise Nepal's foreign relations and diplomacy since the systematic change of 1951.

At least five of his seniors holding the rank of Foreign Secretary, have given highest assessments to Shah. They include top diplomats of ours like Prof Sardar Yadunath Khanal and Major General Padma Bahadur Khatri, both of whom served as Ambassadors for three terms, Foreign Secretary for two non-consecutive periods and Foreign Minister or ministerial level adviser. Khanal took him as a model officer and asked all of us to emulate his standards. Khatri preferred to call him a gem and one of his most trusted war horses that he could deploy on any occasion, good or adverse, in the art and craft of diplomacy.

Others who have given best appraisal of low-profile but very strong-willed diplomat include Jharendra Narayan Singha who has so far made a record of serving as Nepal's Ambassador four times, and Udhav Deo Bhatt, also a National Assembly member after his retirement, who was a new breed in getting inducted into the foreign service after his brief political foray including as a candidate for General Elections to the lower house of Nepal's first elected parliament in 1959. The fifth was Jagdish Shumshere whose seemingly intransigent but strong stand saved the foreign service from professional precipice and massacre when the then government was virtually bent on sacking a majority of 25 diplomatic officers posted to the district of Khotang to hold National Referendum in 1980 on the serious allegations that they indulged in publicity in favour of multiparty system.

A frequent contributor to the newspapers under the pen name of RB Shah and even name de plume, Shah was also involved in the National Referendum prior to his posting as Ambassador to Moscow, as an enlarged extension of his previous role as an efficient spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As an illustrious example of esprit de corps and highly laudable team work spirit that prevailed in the echelons of foreign service those days, Shah volunteered to join the National Media Center established during the National Referendum to liaise with both domestic and foreign media representatives as Deputy Chief Coordinator to assist Chief Coordinator Shardul Shumshere as the latter was not in the best of his health.

Both Shah and Shardul Shumshere were in the same rank of joint secretary that time. While Shah left for Moscow, Shardul Shumshere was given promotion to the rank of Secretary, first in the Ministry of Communication and Information, and later in the Defence Ministry.

Shah was one of our prolific and ready draftsmen with relish, felicity and flair in terms of statements, communiqués, declarations, and speeches and addresses to be delivered by our Heads of State, Heads of Government and Foreign Ministers. He not only relished in what can be called instant preparations of such materials, he was a genius and talented wordsmith, and a versatile writer. It was unique that as a frugal man in terms of few and highly measured words in his personal expression, he was so prolific in preparing texts for high-level diplomatic interactions that won widespread admiration.

Adept in making short responses in words or gestures mostly in symbolic and even abstract or obtuse terms, Shah was once offered the position of Chief Secretary as the then Prime Minister toyed with the idea of promoting him to the highest administrative post. He was not at all keen as he never wanted to deviate from his chosen path and keep himself in unnecessary limelight. If modesty, simplicity, discretion and grace were taken as the right attributes of a diplomat, he possibly excelled all who distinguished the position of Foreign Secretaries for the last seven decades.

This humble self vividly remembers his short but sometimes even cryptic response to the offer of Chief Secretary. Comparing his post of Foreign Secretary to the conventional position of Subba as head of Munshi Khana, he told that he was quite comfortable to remain a Subba than what he called be denigrated to the status of a Khardar, a reference to Chief Secretary who remains a nodal officer to co-ordinate with various sections within the executive and liaise with other organs of government including the then Royal Palace and now Office of the President, Nepal Army and even judiciary, rather than any substantive role as Secretary including Foreign Secretary.

The AFCAN is sad to lose such a noble soul of our diplomacy and expresses deepest tributes to him and extends heartfelt condolences to Madam Usha Shah who made a perfect match in terms of all essential attributes of modesty and simplicity, and the entire family. It is a herculean task if not at all impossible, to find any person of his eminence, poise, character and sincerity and lat Shah remains virtually irreplaceable.



### **Indra Bahadur Singh**

Indra Bahadur Singh (March 24, 1942 – May 29, 2021) alias Baba was a diplomat who joined in a group during the tenure of Jharendra Narayan Singha as Foreign Secretary. Before joining the Nepal Foreign Service, he had a short stint at the National Planning Commission. An accomplished Francophile, he was posted in Paris twice as Deputy Chief of Mission and Ambassador respectively.

In respect of other capitals, he served in Cairo and Islamabad. Grandson of Kazi Karna Bir Singh, brother-in-law of Prime Minister Mohan Shumshere, and younger son of Khadga Bahadur Singh who served in Nepal Army as Brigadier General and was also deputed to civil service as Secretary, he passed away only a year and half after his father's demise at 106 years. Singh seems to have inherited diplomacy from his father who had served in Nepal-China Border Demarcation Commission headed by senior diplomat Major General Padma Bahadur Khatriin late fifties and early sixties.

Khadga Bahadur Singh as a young lieutenant in the Nepal Army had also done an important job of carrying the resignation letter of Maharaj Padma Shumshere from Ranchi, India, to pave the way for formal taking over of Maharaj Mohan Shumshere as the last Rana Prime Minister of Nepal in early 1948.

Indra Bahadur Singh was known for proverbial straight talking to an extent that he spoke from his heart. This was illustrated by one example in Paris when he left the mission on completion of his tenure as Deputy Chief of Mission in August 1980. Before his taking leave, he compared his boss, Prof Krishna Raj Aryal, former Foreign Minister and then Ambassador to France, with Prof. Henry Kissinger, in a piece he wrote in the Visitors' Book of the mission. Aryal was really upset and chose some appropriate moment to complain against him.

Taking it as a proverbially sheer act of sarcasm, Ambassador Aryal came to Charles de Gaulle Airport with the Visitors' Book to formally protest to the visiting Foreign Minister K.B. Shahi was to stay in the city for two days prior to his flight to New York to lead the Nepali delegation to the United Nations General Assembly that year. Another example of his rather off the cuff and direct approach related to his persistent refusal to recognize the seniority of one of his batch mates who though lower in

the public service commission merit ranking, got promoted before him and clearly superseded Singh.

While Singh had a longer innings at headquarters as our diplomatic missions abroad were few and far between in those days, he is mostly taken as a Chief of Protocol that he served for a longer time with keen interest and meticulous flair. Even after his retirement, he served the Ministry as consultant for a year prior to his appointment as Ambassador to Paris.

Singh gave all credit to Jharendra Narayan Singha, an acknowledged expert in terms of all aspects of protocol and classical diplomacy, for training him in the art and craft of diplomacy as the latter was Foreign Secretary at the time of his entry and they served together in Cairo when Singha was transferred from New Delhi as second residential Ambassador to Egypt to replace Anirudha Prasad Singh. This was the maiden diplomatic posting of Indra Bahadur Singh.

Just after his indisposition prior to his rather sudden death, his batchmate and close friend for so many years, Ambassador Badri Prasad Khanal, told us that he had never found Singh ill or inactive for all these years of his association. It seems to be a cruel irony that good people seemed to find priority even in the heavenly abode despite causing sorrow and grief to their relatives and friends.

The AFCAN expresses its heartfelt tributes to senior diplomat Singh and expresses sympathetic solidarity with Madam Ishwari Rana Singh and her children to bear such a colossal loss. It is to the credit of Madam Singh that she supplemented and complemented her husband's frankness and straight forward approach with her grace, decency and polished behaviour.

In terms of personal equations with both diplomats, there is absolutely no doubt that Narendra Bikram Shah proved to be a great mentor, inspiration and guide who taught so many things. Singh was an important asset in teaching basic tenets of protocol and shared many things that he learnt during his long innings in service. He also helped me in terms of getting a summary of accounts prepared by French writers and diplomats pertaining to Nepal.

May the departed souls rest in peace!

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## Annual Activities Report of the AFCAN (January-December, 2021)

The Association of the Former Career Ambassadors Nepal (AFCAN), despite COVID 19 pandemic, did its best to host and organize various regular and specially designed thematic events and programs in the year 2021.

This following chart contains brief description of the events/programs hosted/organized by the AFCAN as follows:

### Annual Activities Report (January to December, 2021)

Date	Program Name
4 Jan, 2021	First Zoom Meeting of the AFCAN Executive Committee
1 Feb, 2021	Zoom Meeting of the AFCAN Members focussing on recent visit of the India's Foreign Minister to Nepal
2 Feb, 2021	Courtesy Call paid on the then Foreign Minister Mr. Pradeep Gyawali at the MOFA, Singhadurbar
2077.10.30	Press Release issued urging the Government to give priority to Senior Citizens in Vaccination against COVID
15 Feb, 2021	Breakfast Meeting with the then French Ambassador
24 Feb, 2021	Talk Program on Prof Yadunath Khanal and his contributions to Nepal's foreign relations
11 March, 2021	Annual Programs (2021)finalisation by the AFCAN EXCOMM and submitted to the MOFA
25 March, 2021	Breakfast Meeting with Pakistan Ambassador on Nepal-Pakistan Relations
27 May, 2021	Zoom Meeting with Bangladesh Ambassador on Nepal-Bangladesh Relations
30 June, 2021	Zoom Meeting with EU Ambassador on Nepal-EU Relations
31 July, 2021	Webinar on Foreign Employment: Problems and Prospects in view of the Pandemic

12 Sept, 2021	Webinar on Nepal's Role in the United Nations
10 Oct, 2021	Webinar on Prospects and Problems of Nepal's Tourism in view of the Pandemic
31 Oct, 2021	AFCAN's family dinner on the occasion of festive seasons
15 Nov, 2021	Breakfast Meeting with the Foreign Minister Hon. Dr. Naryan Khadka
9 Dec, 2021	Hosting of the Annual General Meeting(AGM) of the AFCAN
	Preparation is in full swing to publish AFCAN REVIEW by the end of December, 2021

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## Photographic Glimpses of AFCAN Annual Activities



*Courtesy Call on Hon. FM Gyawali*



*Courtesy Call on Foreign Secretary*



*Breakfast Meeting with Hon FM Dr. Narayan Khadka*



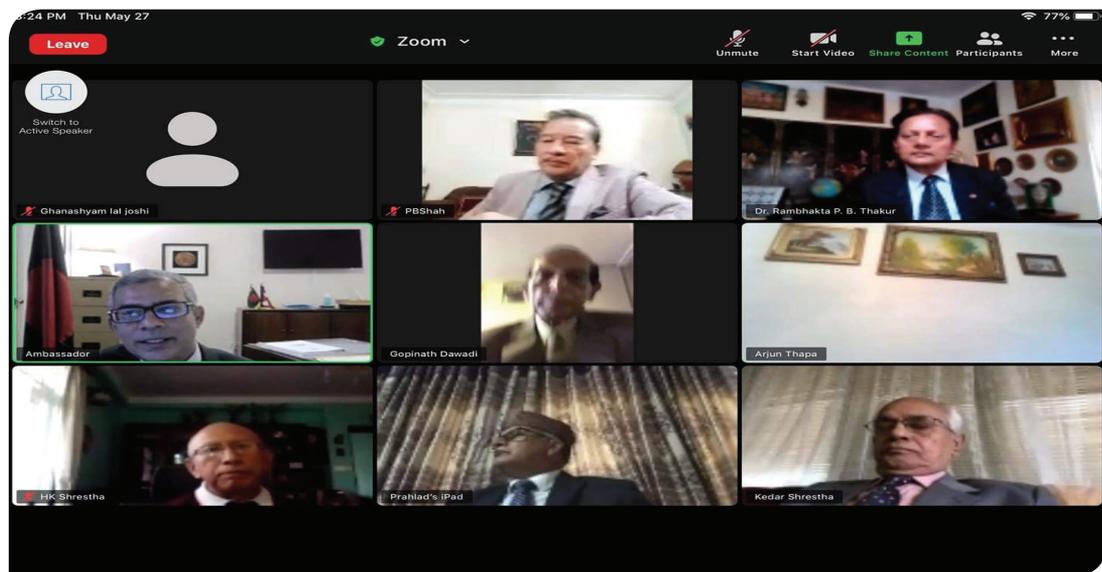
*Talk Program on Prof. Yadu N Khanal*



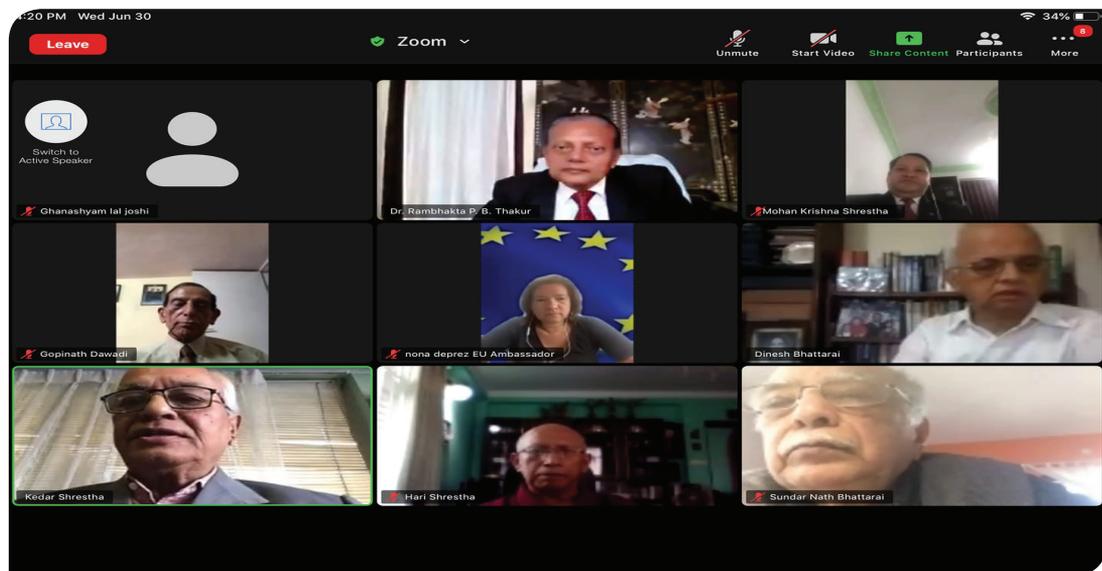
*Webinar on Foreign Employment*



*Webinar on Nepal's Role in the UN*



*Webinar on Nepal-Bangladesh Relations*



*Webinar on Nepal-EU cooperation*



*Webinar on Tourism*



*AFCAN EC First Meeting 2021*



*AFCAN AGM 2021*



*AFCAN Annual Festival Dinner*



*AFCAN Meeting on Nepal's Foreign Policy*



*Brakfast Meeting on Nepal-France Relations*



*Breakfast Meeting on Nepal-Pakistan Relations*



*Courtesy call on Hon. FM Dr. Narayan Khadka*



*President of the AFCAN Dr. Rambhakta Thakur handing over a cheque as a donation from the AFCAN members for the flood victims to the Foreign Secretary Mr. Bharat Raj Poudyal on 10 Dec, 2021 at his office, Singhadurbar. The donation was given for PM Disaster Relief Fund through MOFA.*

**Membership List of the  
Association of Former Career Ambassadors of Nepal (AFCAN)  
(As of December, 2021)**

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## **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.

In order to provide a common platform to share views, observations and thoughts on national and international issues of common concerns, the AFCAN has also initiated to publish the AFCAN REVIEW as an annual compendium of articles, write-ups and observations from 2020 onwards.