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VIEWPOINT
Dr. Tilak Rawal



OPINION
Dipak Gyawali



ENVIRONMENT
Batu Uprety

NEW

SPOTLIGHT

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FORTNIGHTLY

NEPAL'S ENERGY SECTOR Facing Crisis

INSIDE



FAST TRACK
Moving in the Right Direction



AMRIT BAHADUR RAI
A Career Diplomat



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Notes From The Editor



As Nepalese politics is moving towards an uncertain direction. Despite assurances from the ruling party leadership that the coalition will continue for another three years or until new elections, there is no solid foundation to support this claim. Following the release of Rabi Lamichhane, president of Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), on bail for alleged misuse of cooperative funds, he is now facing another charge in Chitwan for a separate fraud case involving a cooperative. While RSP leaders argue that the accusations are politically motivated, government prosecutors are filing petitions for fraud and misappropriation of funds against Rabi Lamichhane and his associates. With the government calling for the winter session of parliament, opposition leaders are working to unite against the ruling party. Maoist center leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda is leading efforts to bring together all opposition parties in parliament to exert pressure on the government. Despite the ongoing political turmoil, we have highlighted the impending energy crisis in the country as the main story for this week. We have examined how the progress in Nepal's energy sector has suffered a setback in just five months since Dipak Khadka assumed the role of Minister of Energy and pursued his own agenda, including the removal of the managing director of Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA). His actions have not only disrupted the NEA but have also led to widespread discontent within the ministry.

Keshab Poudel

Editor

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AMRIT BAHADUR RAI

A Career Diplomat

Well known for his skills in working with Nepal's various diplomatic missions, including the United Nations, Amrit Bahadur Rai has assumed the position of Foreign Secretary of Nepal.

By A CORRESPONDENT

Known for his soft-spoken nature and humility, Amrit Bahadur Rai, who has officially taken on the role of Foreign Secretary of Nepal, has a good reputation for his skills.

Replacing the first female secretary, Sewa Lamsal, whose one-year tenure ended in a difficult situation, Rai is the first secretary to hold this position in the history of Nepal since its unification over 200 years ago.

Having worked at the United Nations as a permanent representative of Nepal for years, Rai has developed a strong understanding of the new emerging global order. This experience will give Rai an added advantage in dealing with the current changing context.

Although Secretary Rai has to clean up the mess left behind in the last year by his predecessor, he can handle things using his own experience and his colleagues in the ministry.

Rai has had an extensive career in diplomacy, global governance, and domestic governance. He joined the Civil Service in 1996 and later joined the Nepal Foreign Service in 2005 as an Under Secretary.

Throughout his distinguished career in the Civil and Foreign Service, Rai has consistently worked to advance

Nepal's national interests, strengthen global partnerships, and enhance Nepal's presence on the international stage. Rai began his career in the Nepal Civil Service in 1996 and later joined the Foreign Service in 2005, holding various prominent positions. Most recently, he served as Acting Foreign

Secretary of Nepal. Rai also served as Nepal's Ambassador to South Africa from 2014 to 2018, with additional accreditation to 18 other countries.

His advocacy for the interests of least developed and landlocked developing countries in multilateral diplomacy

has significantly enhanced Nepal's reputation and national interests on the global stage.

Rai has held various senior positions within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, focusing on South Asia, Europe, the Americas, and planning and monitoring. Earlier in his career, he worked in the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation, the Ministry of General Administration, and

the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare.

Born in 1970 in Sankhuwasabha district, Rai's rise from a civil servant in 1996 to Foreign Secretary showcases his strong commitment to public service.

As Foreign Secretary, Rai possesses the skills necessary to navigate diplomatic situations effectively, and it is anticipated that he will work alongside Dr. Arzu Rana Deuba, a seasoned and capable Foreign Minister, to steer Nepal's foreign policy in the right direction.



Secretary from November 2024. Prior to this role, Rai was the Division Chief of the United Nations, International Organizations, and International Law Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where he also served as the Ministry's Spokesperson.

Rai's international diplomatic experience includes serving as Nepal's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York from 2019 to 2023. During this time, he held key leadership positions such as Vice-President of the UN General Assembly, Chair of the Economic and Financial Committee, and Chair of the Global Coordination Bureau for Least

NEWSNOTES

Four New Korea Overseas Volunteers Arrived In Nepal

The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) has dispatched four new Korea Overseas Volunteers (KOVs) to Nepal. They arrived in Kathmandu on January 20, 2025, and will begin their assignments from February 26, 2025 after completing local adaptation training.

KOV Youngah Maeng will be dispatched to the Himalayan Special School for Autism and Rehabilitation Center, Dhangadhi, Kailali in Special Education Sector, KOV Dahl Sam Hong will be dispatched to Suryodya Municipality Office, Ilam in Tourism sector, KOV Taekyu An will be dispatched to Nepal Red Cross Society, Kaski (Provincial Blood Transfusion Services) and Haeun Kim will be dispatched to Dhaulagiri Provincial Hospital, Baglung in Nursing sector. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, KOICA re-launched its KOV program in December 2021, and since then a total of 21 KOVs have been dispatched to Nepal in various sectors.

The volunteers will take one month of local adaptation training program in Kathmandu where they will learn about



Nepalese society, culture, tradition as well as language. Such kind of adaptation program will be helpful for them to adjust and work in their concerned community/organization enabling them to be familiar with the Nepalese environment.

The objective of the KOV program is to focus more on transferring Korean knowledge and experiences directly at the grassroots level. However, these programs aimed to improve the quality of life of people in partner countries to strengthen the friendship and mutual understanding between Korea and partner countries and to help in the efforts to achieve development goals set by the international community.

Since 1990, KOICA volunteers have been assigned to different government organizations both within and outside the Kathmandu valley, in response to the requests and demands of the Nepalese government. They contribute to diverse sectors such as education, health, agriculture, IT, tourism, and more. As of now, a total of 489 volunteers have been



sent to Nepal, with 4 KOICA volunteers presently engaged in active roles within various government institutions located in the Kavre, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur districts.

Japanese Ambassador Maeda Emphasizes Further Strengthening Of Cordial Relations Between Japan And Nepal

Ambassador of Japan to Nepal MAEDA Toru presented his credentials to Ramchandra Paudel, President of Nepal, at the Office of the President, Shtal Niwas.

After presenting his credentials, Ambassador Maeda and President Paudel discussed bilateral relations between the two countries, including Japan's long-standing economic assistance for the prosperity of Nepal, and active people-to-people exchanges as shown by the increasing Nepali residents in Japan.

Ambassador Maeda emphasized that he would further strengthen the long and cordial relations between the two countries, referring to the upcoming 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Nepal in 2026.

Parliament's Winter Session Call For January 31

The government has decided to convene the winter session of the Federal Parliament on January 31.

Law, Justice

and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ajay Kumar Chaurasia informed that the meeting of the Council of Ministers held on Monday decided to recommend to President Ramchandra Paudel to call a session of the



Parliament at 3 o'clock on Friday, January 18.

The government ended the session of both houses on September 16.

Nepal Welcomes The Recent Agreement For The Release of Hostage And Ceasefire In Gaza

Government of Nepal has been closely observing the unfolding of events in the Middle East since October 7, 2023.

“We welcome the recent announcement of the ‘Agreement for the Release of Hostages and Ceasefire in Gaza’. We hope that this will usher the parties concerned towards the path of lasting peace and stability while ensuring uninterrupted supply of humanitarian assistance to the people in Gaza,” said Ministry



of Foreign Affairs in its press release.

Government of Nepal has consistently urged for the release of all hostages including Bipin Joshi, a Nepali citizen.

“We express our sincere appreciation to the efforts of all those involved in mediation to bring the parties to the agreement,” states Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Ambassador Of Israel To Nepal Pays A Courtesy Call On Prime Minister Oli

Ambassador of Israel to Nepal, Shmulik Arie Bass, paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli at his office in Singha Durbar on Friday.



During the meeting, discussions were held on various issues of bilateral relations and mutual interest as well as on mutual cooperation including information technology, investment, tourism, employment, modernization of agriculture, education and culture,

according to the Prime Minister’s Private Secretariat.

National Assembly member and former Ambassador of Nepal to Israel, Dr Anjan Shakya, and high officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were present on the occasion.

A Nepali Citizen Illegally Stranded In Laos Rescued

With the help of Thai government agencies, a Ne-

pali citizen, who was forced to do illegal work in the Golden Triangle of Laos, Cambodia.

The embassy requests all concerned Nepali not to go for foreign employment only obtaining a labor permit and not to travel any country including Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand in order to earn a lot of money quickly against.

The Embassy requested Nepali citizens to travel country for employment as per the standards set by the government of Nepal,

In addition, the Nepali Embassy Thailand sincerely requests the mass media and civil society to help by conveying this message.



Nepali Ambassador To Israel Professor Pandit Presented His Credential

Prof. Dhan Prasad Pandit, Ambassador of Nepal to the State of Israel, has presented his “Letter of Credence” to Isaac Herzog, President of the State of Israel on 15 January amidst a Ceremony held at the President’s Residence, Jerusalem.

Ambassador Pandit was greeted and received by the President Herzog at the Residence following the presentation of Credentials. President reiterated that Israel values the friendship between Nepal and Israel that dates back to more than six decades.

President Herzog expressed his grief for all the ten murdered, four wounded and one abducted citizen of Nepal. President Herzog specifically mentioned that the Government of Israel is fully committed to bringing all the hostages back along with Bipin Joshi.

President Herzog also stated that the friendship between Nepal and Israel has historical ties since former Prime Minister of Nepal B.P Koirala recognized Israel.



Ambassador Pandit, who addressed the President in Hebrew during his opening remarks while presenting Credentials, expressed his gratitude towards the hospitality and warmth Israel has extended to him including the importance given by President for the release of Joshi.

Ambassador Pandit mentioned the outstanding efforts being made by the Government of Nepal for the release of Joshi at the earliest possible. Additionally, Ambassador Pandit

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also highlighted that bilateral efforts are continuously being made by the active involvement of Foreign Minister of Nepal Dr. Arzu Rana Deuba for Mr. Joshi.

He thanked Israel for extending bilateral coordination and support. He stressed on implementation of all the MOUs in pipeline including Nepal-Israel bilateral cooperation on Agriculture Center of Excellence. He said, he hopes to work with the Government of the State of Israel to strengthen and deepen the relations between Nepal and Israel.

Foreign Minister Dr Rana Requested Qatar's Minister To Support To Release Bipin Joshi

Foreign minister Dr. . Dr Arzu Rana Deuba said that she held a telephone conversation with Qatar's Minister of State of Foreign Affairs Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulaziz Al-Khulaifi.

“While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is continuing diplomatic initiatives for the release of Bipin Joshi, a Nepali youth who is under the control of the Hamas group, this morning I had a phone conversation with Qatar's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulaziz Al-Khulaifi.

Minister Dr. Al-Khulaifi is the chief negotiator and mediator for the peace talks with Hamas on behalf of the Qatari government.

“After the news that Hamas is about to release some of those under its control, I am appealing to the countries that are in contact with Hamas and are mediating for a ceasefire to take more initiatives for Bipin's release,” writes Foreign Minister Dr. Rana.



“In the phone conversation with Dr. Al-Khulaifi, I further requested that special initiatives be taken for Bipin's release.”

“He informed that the Qatar government is taking initiatives to bring the Hamas

group to a ceasefire and release the prisoners, and said that there will be positive news on this issue soon. This has made us more optimistic.”

Dr Arzu Rana Deuba has been requesting countries, which are reported to be in contact with Hamas and are mediating for a ceasefire, to intensify their initiatives for Joshi's release.

Joshi was among those who were kidnapped during the Hamas attack on Israel in October 2023, which led to the killing of more than a thousand people, including 10 Nepalis.

Since then, the Government of Nepal has continued its diplomatic efforts for Joshi's release. Dr Rana has continuously raised the issue at national and regional forums, including the United Nations, and through bilateral meetings for Joshi's safe release.

Nepal-India Joint Military Exercise SURYA KIRAN-XVIII Completed

The eighteenth edition of the joint military exercise SURYA KIRAN involving the Nepali Army and the Indian Army, which started on the 16th of January 2024 at Saljhandi in Rupandehi district, has been concluded today by the Chief of the Staff Lieutenant General Pradip Jang K.C.

In the concluding program, the Chief of Staff Lieutenant General K.C., expressed his gratitude to all the related agencies for the successful completion of the joint exercise.

On this occasion, he congratulated the troops participating in the exercise for the successful completion of the exercise and mentioned that the professional efficiency, high level of dedication and collective commitment displayed by the forces of both countries during the exercise was commendable.

Brigadier General Govindan Praveen spoke on behalf of the Indian Army's Exercise Observer Group, which started with a brief briefing of the exercise by Assistant Director of Joint Exercises Rathi Suraj Gurung.

A total of 668 soldiers from both the countries participated in the exercise, which included topics such as disaster management, counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism, jungle warfare and humanitarian assistance, under the leadership of Major General Nirajan Katwal from the Nepalese Army and Colonel Japendar Pal Singh from the Indian Army.



Major General Prem Bahadur Pun, head of central west Command, Indian military attaché for Nepal and others were present in the closing program.

The Nepali Army believes that this joint military exercise, which has been conducted alternately between Nepal and India since 2007, will further strengthen the friendly mutual relations between the two countries, as well as the development of professional skills at the gross level and increase in mutual understanding.

SAARC And IRENA Sign MoU To Strengthen Regional Cooperation In Sustainable Energy Development

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to bolster regional cooperation in the domain of sustainable energy.

The document, signed by SAARC Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Md. Golam Sarwar, and IRENA Director-Gener-



al, His Excellency Mr. Francesco La Camera, in Abu Dhabi, formalizes a collaborative framework for promoting the widespread and sustainable use of all forms of renewable energy across the South Asian region.

The MoU will establish a structured framework for cooperative endeavors between SAARC and IRENA, with a primary focus on facilitating knowledge exchange, capacity development, and the execution of joint projects that promote renewable energy deployment. By leveraging the respective strengths of each organization, this partnership strives to expedite the transition towards sustainable energy systems within the SAARC Member States.

This partnership aligns with the vision of the leaders of the SAARC Member States and commensurate with the burgeoning global commitment to transition to sustainable energy. Through collaborative efforts, SAARC and IRENA seek to unlock the full potential of renewable energy in South Asia, thereby fostering a more sustainable and prosperous future for the region.

MUSTANG Nostalgia By Kishor Kayastha Unveiled

The GehendraDhimal Foundation, in partnership with the U.S. Embassy Kathmandu, is organizing MUSTANG Nostalgia: A Two-Decade Odyssey, a panoramic photo exhibition. This exhibition showcases an exceptional collection of 30 panoramic photographs by celebrated lens-based artist Kishor Kayastha, capturing the beauty and transformation of the Mustang region over the last two decades.

Kishor Kayastha’s two-decade-long exploration of Mustang is reflected in his stunning panoramic photographs. With MUSTANG Nostalgia, this treasure is unveiled to the public for the first time. With roots in the culturally rich city of Bhaktapur, Kayastha’s work embodies a deep connection to Nepal’s landscapes and heritage, serving as a poignant record of the region’s changing climate, urbanization, and the endurance of Mustang’s ancient traditions within its rugged and spiritual environment.

On January 6, Deputy Chief of Mission Jason Meeks from the U.S. Embassy in Kathmandu inaugurated the “Mustang Nostalgia: A Two-Decade Odyssey” photo exhibition. The event featured live Tibetan music and prayers by Buddhist lamas, creating an atmosphere of reverence for



Mustang’s rich Tibetan cultural heritage.

South Asian University Holds Twelfth Governing Board Meeting, Discusses Future Initiatives And Reforms

The South Asian University (SAU), a key initiative of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), convened its Twelfth Governing Board Meeting on January 7, 2024, at its New Delhi campus. The meeting was attended in person by Governing Board representatives from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, as well as a representative from the SAARC Secretariat and SAU office bearers.

Ambassador Golam Sarwar, Secretary General of SAARC, delivered the inaugural address. He expressed appreciation to the Government of India for hosting the University in New Delhi and for its continued support since the University’s establishment. Ambassador Sarwar conveyed his optimism for SAU’s future and for regional cooperation under SAARC’s guidance, especially with the new President leading the University. He highlighted the challenges facing SAU, including the issues of country contributions, student enrollment and recruitment which need to be addressed to achieve the goals and aspirations envisioned by the founding members. He also commended the University for introducing new programmes, such as online courses in Artificial Intelligence, to address the evolving demands of the contemporary world.



Prof. Aggarwal, the incumbent President of South Asian University, outlined the initiatives he has undertaken since assuming office. He also presented the reforms he envisions for the upcoming years, while acknowledging the constraints that may affect their implementation.

Prof. Mukhtar Ahmed, the Chairman, Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, presided over the meeting and officially called it to order, setting the stage for the discussions that followed.

As the meeting progressed, there was an in-depth and comprehensive examination of the proposed budget for the upcoming year. The Governing Board members thoroughly debated the allocation of resources and the financial plans needed to support the University’s growth and development. It was also deliberated on the importance of releasing fund contributions to ensure the smooth functioning of SAU. Additionally, the meeting focused on the future activities envisioned for South Asian University, with particular attention given to strategic initiatives aimed at expanding its academic offerings, improving infrastructure, and fostering regional cooperation. This discussion was crucial for ensuring that the University remains on track to achieve its goals while navigating any challenges that may arise in the coming years.

BUSINESS BRIEF

Nepal-India Has Immense Potential For Cooperation In Business And Economic Sector: FNCCI President Dhakal

Nepal-India Joint Business Forum held In Kathmandu, handover of trade and investment facilitation

The second meeting of Nepal-India Joint Business Forum (JBF) has been held in Chandragiri Kathmandu. The representatives of Nepal and India participated in the meeting which was held with the aim of strengthening the economic and commercial relations between the two countries.

Welcoming the participants in the meeting, the President of the Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FNCCI) Chandra Prasad Dhakal mentioned that there is immense potential in the economic field between Nepal and India and called for policy reforms to solve the problems seen in both



areas. He said that it is necessary to find a practical solution and move forward

On this occasion, he call to remove the non-customs barriers, facil-

itate the solution to the problems caused by the certification process of Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) in the export of Nepalese goods, connect Indian cities with Bhairahawa and Pokhara airports and easy supply of explosives required for hydropower and other construction development of Nepal. Similarly, he raised the issues of expanding Nepal's access to Indian ports including Mundra (Gujarat), Dhamra (Odisha) and Jawaharlal Nehru (Mumbai).

In the JBF meeting, which was held as a part of the Nepal-India Commerce Secretary-level meeting, the representatives of Nepal and India's businessmen discussed trade, investment, energy, tourism, agriculture, information technology and infrastructure development.

In the same joint meeting, they also discussed the issue like cooperation in hydropower and renewable energy, solar, wind and other projects, clean energy promotion, tourism and connectivity, strengthening road, rail and air connectivity and facilitating cross-border trade, trade and cross-border investment, agriculture

and medicinal plants.

Nepal-India IGC Meeting Discussed On All Aspects of The Bilateral Trade

The Nepal-India Inter-Governmental Committee (IGC) has made a detailed review of all areas of bilateral trade and economic relations. The IGC is a bilateral mechanism aimed at strengthening trade and business relations between the two countries.

According to Embassy of India's X page, Sunil Barthwal, Commerce Secretary India and Gobinda Bahadur Karkee, Secretary, Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies, of Nepal co-chaired the India Nepal Intergovernmental Committee Meeting in Kathmandu, Nepal.

"The two sides had a wide ranging discussion on all aspects of the bilateral trade partnership including measures to further strengthen cross-border infrastructure, enhance connectivity and facilitate trade."

The meeting of the IGC related to trade, transit and cooperation to control unauthorized trade was held in Kathmandu on January 10 and 11.

The agenda included review of transit treaty and trade treaty including electrification of Raxaul-Birgunj railway line, proposed amendments to existing agreements, coordination of norms and gradual development of trade infrastructure. The two sides also reviewed issues related to mutual market access, IPR and taxes.

In the meeting, the Indian side informed that Nepal's request for supply of 200,000 metric tonnes of wheat has been approved.

The Nepali side thanked the Indian side for its continued support in ensuring the supply of essential commodities to Nepal.

At the request of the Nepali side, the Indian side has agreed that in the case of cargo-in-transit in Kakarbhitta (Nepal)-Banglabandh (Bangladesh) via Phulbari (India) route, the maximum axle weight of 18.5 tonnes for two-axle vehicles and 28 tonnes for three-axle vehicles can also be applied in the case of



Nepali vehicles as per the prevailing regulations of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

Responding to the request of the Nepali side, the Indian side informed that Sal (*Shorea robusta*) seeds and squash have been included in India's plant quarantine order.

Requests for inclusion of Jatamsi-root extract, Fragrant Kokila Berry extract, Fragrant Rhizome extract and Timur Berry extract in the list of processed products have also been accepted.

At the request of the Indian side, the Nepali side said that it was positive to review the documents related to reclassification of products such as 'IPAQE 28' in its technical system.

The Indian side briefed about the problems seen in the export of milk to Nepal. The Nepali side has agreed to positively consider the Indian side's request for milk products, including mohi (whey), cheese, which are not produced in sufficient quantities in Nepal.

The meeting welcomed the bilateral initiatives aimed at strengthening uninterrupted inter-country connectivity between India and Nepal through construction of new integrated check posts and railway links, among others.

The two sides expressed their commitment to advance bilateral connectivity, reflecting the shared vision of prosperous bilateral trade.

The two sides have agreed to form a joint working group to discuss the online approval with Nepal and the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA).

Secretary at the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies Govinda Bahadur Karki led the Nepali delegation to the meeting.

Similarly, the Indian delegation was led by Sunil Barthwal, Commerce Secretary at the Ministry of Commerce of India in the meeting attended by senior officials from the Embassy of India in Kathmandu and various ministries.

A joint secretary-level inter-governmental sub-committee (IGSC) meeting on trade, transit and cooperation to control unauthorized trade was held in Kathmandu from January 12 and 13, 2024.(RSS)

AEPC Is Organizing Various Programs To Mark International Clean Energy Day: ED Dhakal

The Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPC) is celebrating the International Clean Energy

Day 2025 with various programmes and activities.

January 26 is being celebrated as the International Day of Clean Energy to mark the development and various initiatives in clean and renewable energy. The United Nations has initiated this celebration since 2024 and it is observed with various programmes and events across the world.

Executive Director of the AEPC, Nawa Raj Dhakal, informed at a press meet organised at his office on Monday that the Centre will organise an interaction with the clean and renewable energy stakeholders on January 26 and meeting with the development partners on January 27 while 'Energy transition for resilient and low carbon economy summit 2025 will be held on January 28'.

"Development partners meet is being organised to update the international development partners about Nepal's policy and programmes and initiatives for the promotion and development of clean energy and get input for their priority areas," said Dhakal.



Likewise, the summit will bring together the clean energy stakeholders to deliberate on the possible future policies and strategies. It is being organised with the aim to identify the sectorial needs, opportunities and challenges, and prioritization of bankable projects and finding opportunities for investment and resource mobilization for energy transition.

It also aims to share success projects and development cooperation in energy sector, showcase potential bankable projects and investment promotion, and produce knowledge materials.

According to Dhakal, especially at a time while Nepal is graduating to a developing nation from the Least Developed Country (LDC) status by 2026 and funds for clean and renewable energy are becoming scarce, we need to constantly work with the potential development partners in order to collaborate and cooperate in the sector and ensure Nepal gets better access to global carbon and energy funds.

"We have been focusing on alternative energy options for the people who lacked access to the national grid

BUSINESS BRIEF

and other alternatives like biogas projects,” he said.

About 98 per cent people have access to energy and role of AEPC will be instrumental in expanding the facility to the remaining 2 per cent people.

So, it has given priority to micro-hydro and solar projects as well as clean cookstoves. On a greater scale, the AEPC has oriented its policies and programmes to Green Climate Fund (GCF). Capacity building for the same is ongoing in coordination with the Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation.

“We aim to reach 1 million households in 150 local bodies of Tarai to promote and develop cleaner energy options including improved cookstoves and solar panels,” said Dhakal.

According to the AEPC, while many areas in local bodies or wards are connected to the national grid, many households in far-flung areas still don't have access to the facility. Likewise, it's a challenge to reduce the number of households that use firewood or cowdung cake to cook food from 54 per cent and users of the LP gas from 44 per cent.

“We need to replace them both,” said Dhakal.

IMF Team Meets Finance Minister Paudel

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) staff team led by Sarwat Jahan, has paid a courtesy call on



Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, Bishnu Prasad Paudel. The team is here to review the Extended Credit Facility (ECF) provided by the IMF to

Nepal.

During the meeting held at the Finance Ministry, Singha Durbar, today, Minister Paudel said signs of improvement are seen in country's economy in recent period, expressing the belief that the future activities of the improvement would bring further positive results.

The government was ready to address the economic challenges through legal, policy-level as well as dia-

logue and it has been paying special attention for the improvement, he mentioned.

DPM Paudel expressed commitment to implement the suggestions received from international community based on country's national context and needs.

Saying the fifth review programme of the IMF was important for the country, the Finance Minister urged the team to hold further discussions on the issues raised about improvement of economy.

The government has focused its attention on policy and structural reforms to resolve economic problems, he clarified.

According to the Finance Minister's private secretariat, he expressed the view that policy reforms would play an important role in strengthening the economy in the long run. Lauding the suggestions and support received from international development partners in the reform programme, he said it would be implemented as per the country's needs.

The IMF team said it was reviewing the impact of past reform programmes and was carrying out homework for future reforms.

The team has come here to review the progress made through the past reform initiatives in connection with making the country's economic development policies and strategic plans timely.

In January 2022, an ECF of USD 371.6 million was taken due to the decline in foreign exchange reserves and weakening balance of payments.

At that time, the ECF was taken to reach 180 per cent of the special drawing rights quota received through the IMF. In previous reviews, the IMF had cited political instability, low implementation of capital expenditure and banking risks as the main challenges.

It also suggested strengthening the financial system and being serious about preventing money laundering. It was emphasized that fiscal discipline is essential by increasing capital expenditure for the long-term stability of the economy

Inflation Has Gone Up From 4.95 To 6.05

The rate of consumer price inflation has gone up to 6.05 per cent in mid-December 2024 compared to 4.95 per cent during the same period in 2023.

Inflation reached the highest in Koshi Province at 7.36 per cent, followed by Madhes at 6.77 per cent and Sudurpaschim at 6.66 per cent, according to the

monthly economic and financial status report published by the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) on Friday.

Among the provinces, it remained the lowest – 4.19 per cent - in Karnali, followed by 4.81 per cent in Gandaki, 5.53 in Lumbini and 5.84 in Bagmati.

Food and beverage pushed the inflation rates up with vegetables, pulses and cereals leading the category. Food and beverage inflation stood at 9.99 per cent whereas non-food and service inflation stood at 3.92 per cent in



mid-December. During the same period in the previous year, the price indices of these groups had increased by 5.00 per cent and 4.92 per cent, respectively.

tively.

The year-on-year price index of the vegetable sub-category increased by 43.05 per cent, pulses and legumes by 10.66 per cent, cereal grains and their products by 9.70 per cent and ghee and oil by 9.39 per cent while the price index of the spices sub-category decreased by 1.18 per cent and sugar and related products by 0.83 per cent.

Under the non-food and services category, y-o-y price index of the miscellaneous goods and services sub-category increased by 7.98 per cent, alcoholic drinks by 7.01 per cent, clothes and footwear by 6.75 per cent and furnishing and household equipment by 5.29 per cent.

Likewise, the foreign exchange reserves increased by 11.4 per cent to Rs. 2273.26 billion in mid-December 2024 from Rs. 2041.10 billion in mid-July 2024.

Of the total foreign exchange reserves, the reserves held by NRB increased by 10.0 per cent to Rs.2033.27 billion in mid-December 2024 from Rs.1848.55 billion in mid-July 2024. Reserves held by banks and financial institutions (except NRB) increased by 24.6 per cent to Rs. 240 billion in mid-December 2024 from Rs.192.55 billion in mid-July 2024.

Development Of Tourism Infrastructure Is Necessary For Tourism Development: President Dhakal

Chandra Prasad Dhakal, President of Feder-

ation of Nepal Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said that the development of tourism infrastructure is necessary for the development of tourism.

Speaking at the Maghe Sankranti Mela-2081 and the 30th anniversary of Sikles Youth Club held at Myagdi Rural Municipality Sikles in Kaski District with the slogan “Sikles Festival for Rural Tourism Promotion”, he held the view that tourism is an important sector for economic development.

Stating that there is immense potential for tourism in Nepal, he said that tourism can make the overall economy of the country sustainable, create jobs and create economic development. He also said that a new Kevalkar is under construction in Sikles and with the construction of Kevalkar, a new dimension will be added to the tourism of that area.

“Sikles is famous in the country and abroad as an iconic tourist destination. Construction of Kevalkar will add new tourist infrastructure to Siklas.

Cable car will not only make a significant contribution to the economic, social and cultural development of this region, but will also become a supporter for the promotion of tourism, economic development and prosperity of the entire region.



He said. Informing that the process works for the new Kevulkar to be built from Sikles to Kori have been completed, he said that the construction of the Kevulkar will have a positive impact on the social and economic development of the area.

Similarly, he said that the preservation of local art and culture is necessary for tourism and praised the role played by the local youth club for the preservation of art and culture.

Inaugurating the fair, Minister of Information and Communication Technology Prithvi Subba Gurung mentioned that tourism is the basis of economic development and said that the government is always ready for infrastructure development and other facilitation.

Sikles village, which has majority of Gurung caste, is located in Madi Rural Municipality-1 of Kaski.

BUSINESS BRIEF

Annapurna and Lamjung snow ranges can be seen nearby from Sikles tourist village. Sikles is located in the northeastern part of Kaski district, at a distance of about 40 km from Pokhara.

Nepal's First Four Betters Model Village Launched In Mandandepur Municipality, Kavre

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Nepal, in collaboration with the Government of Nepal and Mandandepur Municipality, has launched Nepal's first-ever "Four Betters Model Village" in Mandandepur Municipality, Kavre.

This initiative lined Nepal's journey toward sustainable development, providing a comprehensive framework to enhance the quality of life for local communities. By focusing on the holistic betterment of the village, it aims to improve infrastructure, to promote social, economic, and environmental resilience.

Through this 4 Betters model, communities are empowered to become self-reliant, cultivating the necessary skills and resources to address their own challenges. The approach prioritized long-term growth by encouraging innovation, local ownership, and collaboration, ultimately creating a more sustainable and equitable future for all.

On the program, Dr Ramkrishna Shrestha, Joint Secretary of Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development. Ken Shimizu, FAO Representative for Bhutan and Nepal, and Tok Bahadur Waiba, Mayor of Mandandepur Municipality, inaugurated the initiative by laying the foundation stone for an irrigation system that will serve over 100 hectares of agricultural land. The ceremony, held at the Mandandepur Municipality office, also included a flag-raising event, symbolizing the municipality's commitment to this initiative.

During the event, along with dignitaries, the representatives from municipal planning committees, cooperatives, schools, and farming communities were also presented.

FAO Representative Ken Shimizu emphasized potential of the Four Betters framework—Better Production, Better Nutrition, a Better Environment, and a Better Life will serve as a blueprint for achieving sustainable and inclusive communities across Nepal. By integrating traditional agricultural practices with modern, innovative techniques, the

initiative respects cultural heritage while advancing sustainability.

The Four Betters Model Village adopts a comprehensive approach to address critical issues related to agriculture, food security, and livelihoods. At its core is a focus on fostering innovation while addressing gaps in local agri-food systems. The initiative included the construction of an irrigation dam, which will significantly boost agricultural productivity in the region.



Additional components include establishing nutritional gardens in schools, strengthening farmers' field schools, promoting eco-tourism through homestays in Gurung communities, introducing aquaculture programs, and preserving traditional farming methods.

This initiative empowers women, youth, and indigenous communities, promoting equitable participation and benefits for all. By uplifting marginalized groups, it fosters collective progress and innovation, integrating cultural traditions with sustainable solutions.

Dr. Ram Krishna Shrestha, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development (MoALD), extended his heartfelt congratulations to the municipality and residents on the launch of the Four Betters Model Village. He remarked, "This initiative represents a new milestone toward sustainable agriculture and community development. I wish the project great success and commend FAO Nepal for its longstanding contributions to transforming Nepal's agricultural landscape.

Tok Bahadur Waiba, Mayor of Mandandepur Municipality expressed his gratitude to FAO and the Government of Nepal for their partnership and support. He reaffirmed the municipality's commitment to replicating the Four Betters model in other regions, highlighting the transformative potential of such collaborations. "This collaboration reflects our dedication to building a sustainable and prosperous future for our community," he stated.

Other speakers from Municipality extended their

appreciation to FAO, including federal and provincial ministries, schools, farming communities, and the media, for their invaluable contributions to the success of the initiative. The Four Betters Model Village in Mandandepur Municipality sets an inspiring precedent, composed to become a scalable example of how sustainable agricultural practices can transform communities across Nepal. It offers a replicable blueprint for fostering sustainable development, strengthening local economies, and empowering communities across the nation, ultimately contributing to Nepal's

goals of sustainability and inclusive growth.

Nepalese Young Entrepreneurs Forum (NYEF) Kathmandu Chapter Hosts Global IME Bank Presents NYEF Startup Awards 4.0

The Nepalese Young Entrepreneurs Forum (NYEF) Kathmandu Chapter successfully hosted the much-anticipated Global IME Bank Presents NYEF Startup Awards 4.0, celebrating the innovative spirit and entrepreneurial excellence of Nepalese startups. Held at the prestigious Hyatt Regency, Chabahil, Kathmandu, the event brought together



over 150 distinguished guests from diverse sectors to recognize Nepal's best entrepreneurial talents.

This year's winner, DL Upload, was honored with a cash

prize of NPR 400,000 and the prestigious Startup Award. Melt Down secured the first runner-up position, receiving a cash prize of NPR 200,000 while the Audience Pick Award went to Khetipati Organics, awarded NPR 100,000.

The event was graced by Prof. Dr. Shiva Raj Adhikari, Vice Chairman of the National Planning Commission, as the Chief Guest, and Mr. Chandra Prasad Dhakal, President of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNC-CI), as the Special Guest.

Speaking at the event, Chandra Prasad Dhakal emphasized his unwavering support for startups, highlighting their role in driving economic growth and innovation in Nepal. The Chief Guest, Prof. Dr.

Shiva Raj Adhikari, underscored the need for policies that create a conducive environment for startups to thrive.

Abhimanyu Golchha, President of NYEF Kathmandu Chapter, led the event with visionary leadership, ensuring that the NYEF Startup Awards 4.0 received immense appreciation as an inspiring platform for innovation and entrepreneurship.

The seven finalists, each representing exceptional creativity and entrepreneurial brilliance, were: DL Upload, Melt Down, Khetipati Organics, Gyan Bazaar, E-Kagajpatra, Mach20 Orbitals and Smartpalka

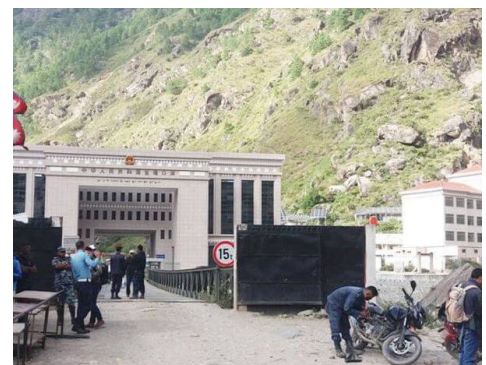
All finalists showcased groundbreaking ideas and made a lasting impression on attendees. The NYEF Startup Awards continues to serve as a vital platform for identifying and honoring Nepal's most promising startups, paving the way for their success in national and global markets.

Nepal And China Agree To Curb Criminal Activities At Rasuwagadhi Check Point

An understanding has been reached between the border officials of Nepal and China to stop possible criminal activities at Rasuwagadhi check point and taking legal action against the guilty.

During the border security meeting comprising Chief District Officer of Rasuwa and the Administrator of Kerung Province of China held on Sunday, both sides agreed to curb any illegal activity in Kerung check point, to ease trade and business and make the border systematic and disciplined.

Chief District Officer of Rasuwa, Arjun Poudel, said an understanding was reached to make arrangement of safety of Nepalis



working in Kerung, to control smuggling of gold and animal body parts and forwarding legal process against those involved in such activities. (RSS)

Six Months Of Deuba And Oli



BY: DR.TILAK RAWAL

Just a few days after the powerful earthquake shook Tibet region of China on January 7, 2025 causing immense damage to lives and property there, Prime Minister Oli- generated political turmoil here badly shook the yet-to-be stabilized politics of Nepal. Political damages caused by this jolt, however, have not yet come to the fore and are likely to remain unquantifiable for some time. It may be noted that Oli-generated convulsion in the form of his observation that Nepal's constitution could be amended only in 2030 has surprised many people including leaders of coalition partner Nepali Congress (NC). While signing the deal to form the new government ousting Prachanda, the Deubas and Oli believed that political stability and economic prosperity would be achieved through amendment of the constitution and formulation and execution of economic policies and programmes by their government. Many thought, listening to them, it was simply a matter of a few months before they gave us an amended constitution.

There was, however, no dearth of skeptics who did not want to believe what was stated in the Seven-Point Deal made public only after the Oli-led government was formed. Understandably, it is difficult for politicians to remain quiet in the light of Oli's statement about constitutional changes as it appears to shake one of the major pillars of the seven-point pact signed between Deuba's NC and Oli's CPN UML. Although Nepal government and UML party have corrected PM-generated shocks statement, the aftershocks of it are still continuing with even some notable NC leaders coming down heavily upon Oli, let alone Prachanda who has been restlessly attacking the deal and this government ever since his ouster from power some six months ago.

Dahal has been moving around the country and attending different fora to air his resentments against the government. People are lending their ears to his remarks but they are also finding it very difficult to believe that he was thrown out of power mainly because he was about ready to open corruption cases involving political personalities like Oli. He also wants people to believe that he will do the needful once back to power. The Maoist Chair, however, has not been able to convince the

people that he was on the verge of opening the files because they know he had the time to act before his dislodgement. Further, he has remained very selective in attacking major politicians and their parties. He often mentions Giri Bandhu Tea State scandal in which Oli is said to be involved but hardly talks about infamous Bhutanese Refugee scandal allegedly masterminded by some unscrupulous people who bribed some NC stalwarts into getting the support. Despite some action taken against a few leaders, people feel that not enough has been done, more specifically in case of NC heavyweights. People know Deuba had an equally important role, if not more, in showing Prachanda the door but he has calculatedly chosen Oli for public thrashing, accusing him of corruption and misrule.

People know Deuba had an equally important role, if not more, in showing Prachanda the door but he has calculatedly chosen Oli for public thrashing, accusing him of corruption and misrule.

In his deliberations now a days, he hardly mentions corruption scandals people think NC stalwarts have a lot to do with. He seems to have a firm idea at the back of his head that a transactional and flexible

Deuba can be roped into cooperation with him in days ahead to form the next government, dislodging Oli. It seems Prachanda is simply eyeing the chair of power and the Cartel of which he is a member along with other top leaders is still in existence and very much operational. People have understood that top leaders occasionally create a sub-group within the Cartel to dislodge a particular government and create a new one without hurting each other's major interest. Major parties are also known to be sincere and honest in distributing/sharing amongst themselves benefits emanating from somewhat government-protected scandals of different nature and magnitude. It may be appropriate to note the observation of Jagannath Khatiwada, leader of CPN Unified Socialist that any bribe in the tune of Rs.400 million and above is shared by major political parties. This kind of truth-telling by a noted politician has bolstered the confidence of commoners like this scribe who has been talking and writing about this kind of tacit agreement between top political players of this country. Therefore, irrespective of what Prachanda or any other top leader says, initiating corruption-related legal action against a top leader or his family member by another is unthinkable. These leaders have been tried time and again. Prachanda, however, could be right

in observing that the fall of Oli-led government is imminent. Many lawmakers of NC are unhappy with Oli's remarks and the way this government is functioning. Resentment seems to be brewing even within UML one of the senior leaders of which (Vim Rawal) has been recently sacked and two central leaders of the party have been suspended for a period of six months. Many leaders in UML are also said to be in a mood to welcoming former president Bhandari in the party to address the disgruntlement against the current leadership and solidly unify the fragile party. NC lawmakers are freely airing their resentments against the government, more specifically their opinions are directed against Oli. Equally active looks their commander Deuba who, despite not looking healthy and young, has been stretching around meeting his own ministers and politicians belonging to different parties. It will be soon known whether these activities of Deuba are for cementing the foundation of the current dispensation or his efforts are directed towards pulling the rug from under Oli's weakened feet.

Important thing to be noted is that political stability, promised by Deuba/Oli some six months ago, is nowhere to be seen and amending the constitution, touching upon issues of just their choice, in a short period of time is very difficult. Political forces are likely to be assertive in amendment-related matters, which is shown, amongst others, by the recent attempt of Madhes-based political parties to forge an alliance. It is difficult to say how successful they will be in meaningfully coming together, forgetting their divergent interest and activities, but these kind of activities can be taken as a pointer towards emergence of a situation where various forces will be exerting pressure to get the constitution amended their way. Both Deuba and Oli must have realized by now that Nepal is not going to be politically stable soon. Likewise, with no mention worthy positive signs seen in the economy thus far, their commitment of achieving prosperity is very lightly taken by people. Oli with different non-economic matters to pay serious attention to, it seems Finance minister Bishnu Poudyal has been given the entire responsibility of correcting the ailing symptoms shown by our economy since long.

Despite Bishnu Poudyal's sincere efforts to implement the budget prepared by Maoist leader Barshaman Pun, data made available by the concerned authorities do not reflect any semblance of positive change in the economy, with the sole exception of remittance-gifted improvement in the external sector. It has been almost certain that the economy is unlikely to grow by the hoped 6 percent, which could be conveniently blamed on the damage/loss caused by the incessant rain of September 26/27, 2024. Interesting to note, however, is the concerned agency's latest revelation that paddy production would increase by 3 to 5 percent, contrary to their earlier assessment that its production would decrease by 2 percent. These disturbing data aside, the concerned at the finance ministry must be genuinely worried looking at the six monthly

progress of budget implementation as it is less than 40 percent of the target on most fronts. Capital expenditure has continued to remain pathetic, with only Rs.56.93 billion (16.16 percent of the targeted Rs.352.35 billion) spent in the six months of this FY. It may also be interesting to observe that under financial management (debt servicing) head 45 percent of the annual target was spent in the six months. Government has been allocating more funds for debt servicing than for capital expenditure. Recurrent expenditure has also registered a progress of 40 percent, spending Rs.452 billion out of the annual target of Rs.1140 billion. On the revenue front also, progress has been unsatisfactory, with only Rs.399.60 billion

collected in the six months, which is only 28 percent of the annual target of Rs.1419.30 billion. Government, therefore, has no choice but to get into aggressive borrowing as the gap between income and expenditure (budget deficit) is widening day by day. About 44 percent of the annual borrowing

target has been met. Trade deficit is on the rise, despite recent surge in export to India of palm and soybean oil. Interesting to note would be the fact that these products have been appearing as major items on either side of the trade chart and have not been doing much good to the economy. To further complicate the already difficult living condition in Nepal, inflation is also on the rise.

Looking at the situation on both fronts (economic and political), Deuba and Oli should not waste time in accepting that they have failed to deliver the promised good and no meaningful contribution is expected of them, no matter how much time they get. They have managed to get several ordinances issued ostensibly to better govern the country and create facilitating conditions in several areas but quite a few knowledgeable people are suspicious about the interest and intention behind this act of the current rulers who do not deserve any benefit of doubt. Scattered opposition parties have also come together to oppose this. Infact, people are sick and tired of these leaders and they are in no mood to trust Prachanda either because they think he belongs to the same ruling Cartel. Prachanda, however, has an opportunity to genuinely show that he is different from others and is for major change this time around. People are not for cosmetic change and they are not likely to be fooled by peps talk and false assurances anymore. Nepal's want to avoid violence to the extent possible because their preference is for a peaceful change, which is possible only when the rulers of this country cooperate. Make no mistake, the much wanted peaceful change will be less injurious even to the rulers who have failed us and our country.

Happy New Year 2025!

Dr. Rawal is a former governor of NRB.

US PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP

Begins Second Tenure

Donald Trump has started his second term by signing several executive orders, which will have implications for Nepal as well.

By A CORRESPONDENT

The decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement and the World Health Organization will significantly impact countries like Nepal, which rely on support in the health sector. Despite Nepal receiving a small amount of grant through USAID, any changes in the Trump administration's policies are likely to affect various sectors in Nepal, including health and community development.

Trump was inaugurated as the 47th president of the United States on Monday, local time, and he emphasized in his speech that the "golden age of America" is beginning "right now."

His order to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement was among the actions taken on his first day in office. Trump had pledged to sign executive orders that align with his campaign promises.

Trump withdraws from Paris Agreement again

Trump has signed an executive order for the United States to withdraw from the Paris Agreement, the international framework for combating global warming. Trump had

previously withdrawn from the accord during his first term, arguing that it was an "unfair agreement that restricts American manufacturing." The US later rejoined it under the Biden administration.



Trump revokes executive actions of the previous administration

Trump also signed orders to revoke executive actions of the Biden administration. He said that he was revoking "disruptive, radical executive actions of the previous administration." Trump has been critical of the "diversity, equity, and inclusion" (DEI) initiatives, saying that they have

replaced "hard work, merit, and equality with a divisive and dangerous preferential hierarchy."

Trump orders hiring freeze and "return to in-person work"

Trump ordered a freeze on the hiring of federal civilian employees. The order requires that no vacant positions as of noon on January 20, 2025, may be filled, and that no new positions may be created unless specified by the President's memorandum or other applicable law. Trump also signed a memorandum demanding heads of all departments and agencies to take necessary steps to terminate remote work arrangements and require employees to return to work in person on a full-time basis.

Trump pardons people charged for US Capitol attack

The president announced he has granted pardons to about 1,500 people who were prosecuted in connection with the January 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol. Many of his supporters faced charges for assaulting police and other security officers.

Trump announces withdrawal from WHO

Trump has signed an executive order withdrawing the United States from the World Health Organization. During his first term, Trump criticized the WHO, claiming its response to the COVID-19 pandemic was biased in favor of China. He formally notified the United Nations of the US withdrawal but Biden reversed the decision on his first day in office.

Trump eyes tariffs on Mexico, Canada from Feb.1

Trump says he is considering imposing 25 percent tariffs on Mexican and Canadian imports as early as February 1. He accuses both countries of allowing many people, and the synthetic opioid drug fentanyl, to cross into the United States.

Trump celebrates with supporters

US President Donald Trump celebrated his comeback on Monday with thousands of supporters at a festive indoor parade, and had plans to sign off on a slew of executive actions aimed at enacting his agenda. Many of his supporters flocked to Washington to celebrate his inauguration.

Trump was originally slated to travel from the Capitol Building to the White House as crowds watched along the way. But frigid conditions forced the event inside to the nearby Capital One Arena.

The new president also said he planned to shake up the current trade system in his inaugural address.

He said, "Instead of taxing our citizens to enrich other countries, we will tariff and tax foreign countries to enrich our citizens."

But local media say while Trump plans to direct federal agencies to in-

vestigate trade policies, he is unlikely to impose new tariffs on his first day.

The inauguration ceremony

His inaugural address touched on restoring law and order, tariffs on foreign countries and reshaping immigration policy.

The Republican took the oath of of-



office in the Capitol Building, one of the rare times inauguration ceremonies were held indoors. The original plans changed due to cold weather.

Trump inauguration speech: 'Golden Age of America' begins in inauguration speech

Trump told the crowd:

"The golden age of America begins right now. From this day forward, our country will flourish and be respected again all over the world."

"We will be the envy of every nation, and we will not allow ourselves to be taken advantage of any longer. During every single day of the Trump administration. I will very simply put America first."

Former presidents, Trump's cabinet picks, and billionaires, including Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos, made the guest list.

In an unusual move, Japanese Foreign Minister Iwaya Takeshi and Chinese Vice President Han Zheng got invites, too. People in those roles don't nor-

mally attend the event.

It was a fitting move, perhaps, as Trump promised a different era with big goals.

He said: "The United States will once again consider itself a growing nation, one that increases our wealth, expands our territory, builds our cities, raises our expectations and carries our flag into new and beautiful horizons."

"And we will pursue our manifest destiny into the stars, launching American astronauts to plant the stars and stripes on the planet Mars."

Trump emphasized his commitment to protecting American workers and revitalizing the economy, and said he will sign executive orders.

He announced he will declare a national emergency at the border with Mexico as part of his efforts to combat undocumented immigration.

White House announces US to leave Paris Agreement

The White House also announced the US will withdraw from the Paris Agreement, the international treaty on climate change.

Trump previously pulled out of it during his first term, branding the accord unfair on the grounds it restricts the US manufacturing industry.

The country later rejoined it under the Joe Biden administration.

Trump met Biden at the White House on Monday morning before heading to the ceremony venue. He was sworn in and became president for the second time at noon, as stipulated by the Constitution.

Polls by CNN, Fox News and others show opinions on Trump closely split between favorable and unfavorable.

What Might The Age Of Trump Look Like?



BY: DIPAK GYAWALI

Donald Trump, with his remarkable victory in the US presidential elections of 2016 and now again in 2024, has left political hacks and media pundits with egg on their faces. He won against a hostile deep-seated political machine (and corporate media) both times. Contrary to the norms of American democracy where it is not so much public's votes but the money of billionaires that ends up selecting politicians, he defeated Kamala Harris and her Democrats who collected three times more campaign funds than he did. His seen-as-improbable victory has tectonic repercussions both within the US and, more importantly internationally.

In his first term, an outsider Trump was hampered and shackled by what is called the Deep State, a cabal of long-term entrenched politicians, senior bureaucrats and covert intelligence operatives determined to resist any political change in US policy Trump might have brought about. In that mission, he was tarred and smeared with allegations of colluding with Russia and other foreign powers, his personal peccadillos turned into massive legal firestorms even after he had left office.

The course corrections that Trump 1.0 as the 45th president attempted were both far-sighted and also myopic. He had already gone down in history as the first US president in many decades who did not start a new foreign war, even though he inherited many what he called "forever wars" from his predecessors, and the resource hemorrhaging they entail from which he has promised to pull out. He began a rapprochement with North Korea's Kim Jong Un; and even had to sack his defense secretary James Mattis for opposing his plan to pull out of Syria (he now inherits a bigger US involvement mess there after Assad's sudden ouster by Israel, Turkey and the US, the latter having to now call a terrorist with US's ten million dollar bounty on his head "Your Excellency"!). He saw through the massive corruption scam that was Ukraine (led by Obama's vice president Joe Biden); but the Deep State was able to turn the table on him with the charge of colluding with Russia, which probably contributed to his eventual election loss to Joe Biden in 2020.

Many other decisions made by Trump 1.0 were guided by short-term business interests and not very statesman like. His withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement (which Joe Biden subsequently reinstated but which Trump 2.0 has again withdrawn from on Day 1), the Iran Nuclear Deal as well as the World Health Organization, bluntly telling Europeans US is prepared to ditch NATO unless they pay more (up to 5% of their GDP) for their defense, as well as shifting the US embassy in Israel to Jerusalem were impulsive, myopic decisions that have contributed to upending the Old International World Order and given a push for multipolarity.

Though Biden reversed many of those decisions, a reinvigorated (and wiser with experience) Trump now returns with a much bigger public mandate to push his old agenda. He not only won a decisive electoral victory but (unlike in 2016) also the popular vote and carried with him all the so-called swing states, the Senate and the House. Unlike in 2016, this time he has already announced a slew of cabinet and other important positions which turned a mentally declining incumbent Joe Biden into an even lamer duck than normal. It was evident in how, even before formally taking office, Trump's Middle-East envoy was able to arm-twist Netanyahu into accepting a ceasefire deal he had been balking from.

Before speculating on what a stronger Trump 2.0 might do, it might be worthwhile to see how lame duck Joe Biden's last misuse of presidential powers will demoralize an already humiliated and divided opposition Democrats and make Trump's tasks much easier. After much crowing about "upholding the law" and not pardoning anyone no matter how close to the president, he preemptively pardoned his son Hunter Biden not only for the gun laws violations he was investigated for but for ANYTHING he might have committed from 1st January 2014 onwards. That included influence peddling with bribery for the "big guy", i.e. vice president Biden on behalf of business interests from Ukraine's Burisma gas company to China! To make matters worse, on the last day of his presidency, he preemptively pardoned other family members suspected of bribery and influence peddling as well as those investigating Trump

supporters who rioted at the Capitol against a “stolen election” in 2020. Legal quibbling and niceties aside, it certainly makes Biden look very guilty!

So, what can be expected from Trump 2.0? His focus will be entirely internal – making America great again with re-industrializing US manufacturing which Globalization Liberalism since the collapse of the Soviet Union had decided to outsource to China and elsewhere. It will not be an easy task, since manufacturing once lost to those who do it more efficiently and cheaply cannot effortlessly be brought back. It cannot also be forcefully dictated since with manufacturing power going East, military power (in the form of armament manufacturing) too has significantly shifted out of the US to emerging powers like China, Russia and Iran as the Ukraine and West Asia conflicts have shown.

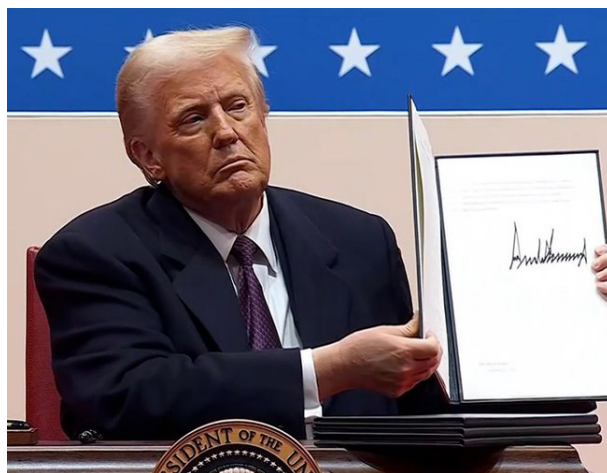
It has not been very long when leaders of the Collective West were cocksure that their sanctions against Russia had already brought it to its knees: EU’s Ursula von der Leyen, UK’s Defense Ministry and US’s Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo even went on record to say that Russian military was on its last leg, that it was fighting with shovels and cannibalizing chips from washing machines to run their military hardware. It took hardly two years of a painful reawakening to have the NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte walk back and say that Russia produces more weapons in three months than all of NATO does in over a year!

But that has not stopped Trump from threatening to use force, in military or other less coercive ways, to further America’s commercial and to that end strategic interests, especially in the Western hemisphere. His statements about re-acquiring the Panama Canal, taking over Greenland and merging Canada into the US have alarmed North and South Americans as well as NATO allies in Europe. Although many have brushed it off as “Maga-lomania”, there is a deeper and more fundamental lesson to be taken: as Trump tries to make America great again, its Latin and Western allies too will be forced back to making their own countries “great again” without American support, or more probably against contending American interests. It means that Collective West (and NATO or EU) will no longer be a monolithic collective, especially with the rise of BRICS.

For the Eastern hemisphere (or Rest of the World, Global South, multipolar world etc. – new terms will surely emerge to reflect a new reality) Pax Americana will be buried by Max Americana. American engagement will be high-

ly transactional, furthering short-term business interests without any overarching global ideology. While the Cold War period was one of “democracy versus communism”, the period since then was of trade liberalization and globalization. Trump’s inward focus means even that is consigned to the dustbin of history: imposition of tariffs, irrelevance of World Trade Organization (indeed perhaps even the UN), use of force to settle disputes etc. may be the norm in the years ahead. The impact of such a shift is already being felt in Europe which is reacting by electing its own-country-first promoting right-wing parties and politicians.

That limited vision also comes with severe contradictions.



While Trump arm-twisting Netanyahu and forcing a ceasefire in Gaza was welcome, another development pointed opposite to the entrenched Zionism in US politics that is hugely influenced by Jewish funding via AIPAC. Among his first acts as president, Trump removed Biden’s sanctions against Israeli land grabbers in the West Bank; and his own Jewish son-in-law Jared Kushner stands very much to gain from such land-grabbing. This is not going to restore America’s declining image and clout in West

Asia or the Muslim world.

For small countries like Nepal (Trump has called Nepal “Nipple” and Bhutan “Button”!), gone are the days of looking up to the US for both development and diplomatic support: we will have to fend for ourselves living between our two giant neighbours. Most significant will be the final nail in the coffin for the development industry of Trump’s actions. The Age of Aid was already in decline since the collapse of the Berlin Wall, with the closure of UK’s DFID as well as other such organizations of Nordic countries. USAID had already been severely downsized by administrations as far back as Bush and Obama with it losing its palatial grandeur of Rabi Bahawan to be confined to a few rooms in the basement of Maharajanj.

Now, Trump, among his first act as president, has suspended foreign aid for 90 days pending a thorough review. Earlier he had said that all aid should be stopped and converted to loans with tough strings. No one should be surprised by this: US debt has exploded to unmanageable limits overshadowing its largest-in-the-world defense budget prompting fears that US might even default! Under such conditions, discarding foreign aid would be no more than discarding wrapping paper. Aid addicted countries like Nepal better prepare for such an aid-less world in the Age of Trump!



NEPAL'S ENERGY SECTOR Facing Crisis

Since assuming the role of Minister of Energy, Water Resources, and Irrigation, Minister Dipak Khadka has been disrupting the progress and development efforts of Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) and other energy-related organizations under his leadership. Despite hindering NEA's operations, Minister Khadka is now seeking further support from development partners for the energy sector. This raises questions about his intentions

By A CORRESPONDENT

On the same day that the reconstruction of a section of the desilting basin damaged by landslides on September 26 and the 456 MW Upper Tamakoshi hydropower project began generating electricity, Minister Dipak Khadka convened a meeting with Nepal's development partners

at his office.

The completion of one part of the desilting basin and the start of electricity generation by the 456 MW Upper Tamakoshi project have brought relief to NEA and country. However, the full operation of the of Upper Tamakoshi project is dependent on the completion of the

reconstruction of the second desilting basin.

Despite the challenges, the diligent efforts and frequent site visits by Kulman Ghising, the managing director of NEA, and Mohan Prasad Gautam, the CEO of Upper Tamakoshi Ltd, have led to the completion of maintenance work on

the Upper Tamakoshi project. The project has now started generating electricity, helping to avert the imminent energy crisis.

While one desilting basin has been successfully maintained, the maintenance of the other basin, damaged during the last flood, still needs to be completed.

The NEA is facing difficulties in managing power supply with a shortfall of around 400 MW due to a reduction in electricity generation from IPPs by one fourth.

Nepal's installed capacity is over 3500 MW in the rainy season but drops to 1500 MW in winter, while the peak demand remains around 2400 MW at all times. NEA's MD Ghising is managing the shortfall by importing electricity from India during the day and utilizing all of NEA's power plants during peak times. Since IPPs' power plants are run-of-the-river based, they cannot be used during peak demand.

The country's power sector is currently facing challenges, and MD Ghising is working to prevent power cuts for consumers. How-



ever, Minister Khadka is focused on removing MD Ghising, as he believes Ghising is pressuring industrialists to pay their dues for dedicated feeder lines used during the 18 load shedding periods at the expense of the public. Minister Khadka's dissatisfaction with Ghising's performance has led him to engage in an

image-boosting strategy, including announcing policy documents, meeting with donors, and using so-

cial media to counter Ghising.

Instead of focusing on these tactics

Minister Khadka should support NEA in completing transmission lines and distribution systems, such as the Inaruwa-Hetauda 400 kV transmission line, and facilitate the development of projects like Dudhkoshi, Upper Arun, and Budhigandaki to enhance energy security for the future. He should also work with the Finance Ministry to allocate adequate budgets for new transmission, generation, and distribution projects that have been long overdue. These steps are essential to achieve the goal of utilizing 28,000 MW by 2035.

Since Minister Khadka stated that Nepal will generate 28,000 MW by 2035, he should make further efforts to materialize his words by focusing on transmission, distribution, and generation.

However, the current obstructions created by Minister Khadka and his team, including the secretary and expert advisors, are likely to create a major crisis for the energy



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sector in Nepal.

Sending one notification letter after another with a list of directions to MD Ghising, opening an office at NEA, and mobilizing the board of directors and other officials to obstruct MD Ghising, Minister Khadka has caused significant damage to NEA and its expansion work. "Although MD Ghising's tenure is just over six months from now, Minister Khadka needs to start fresh with his approach, giving up his single-minded agenda to disrupt NEA and MD Ghising," said an energy expert.

Jagadulla Hydropower Project

His day-to-day interventions have already caused significant damage to NEA and other agencies under him. His recent intervention in the tender process of the Jagadulla Hydropower Project is likely to delay the completion of the project by two years.



Similarly, his decision to sell the shares of Mugu Hydropower and Kimathanka Project to the private sector has sparked a major controversy and forced him to reverse it.

The process initiated for financial partnership in Mugu Karnali and Kimathanka Arun hydropower projects, which are considered commercially attractive, has been cancelled.

The Electricity Production Company Limited (VUCL) called for proposals for both projects, rushing

the procedure to accommodate certain individuals and business houses. Now, the process of selecting a company for financial partnership will be restarted by amending the procedure.

The 1902 MW Mugu Karnali and 454 MW Kimathanka Arun projects were hastily compiled by creating procedures to limit competition. With the policy approval of Energy Minister Khadka, VUCL disregarded national interests and previous practices, causing a stir even within the ruling party.

Minister Khadka approved the process on November 7, the same day he submitted a petition requesting policy approval for the investment partnership procedure from VUCL under the Ministry of Energy. Following this, the VUCL Board of Directors meeting, chaired by the Energy Secretary, formed a three-member sub-committee on November 9, led by Binod Kumar Bhattarai, a company director, to draft the 'procedure for sharing investment for project construction'.

The committee approved the procedure on November 14 after the sub-committee submitted it within a week. The proposal for investment partnership was then invited with a 15-day deadline, which was later extended after the Anti-Corruption Commission showed interest.

Congress MP and industrialist Binod Chaudhary's CG Energy Pvt. Even if there is only one proposal, the procedure was made to precede the process.

Similarly, Nobel Group of Hydro Energy as well as Bela Nepal Industries, Vision Energy and Power, NJ Hydro Energy, and Anak Hydropower had proposals for the 454 MW Kimathanka Arun.

Nobel Group of Hydro Energy belongs to Congress MP Sunil Sharma while Vision Energy

has Maoist and Congress leaders.

The selection process was stopped on the instructions of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli after the disputed news.

Energy Minister Khadka's work style has also been criticized within the Congress. Energy Minister Khadka was also questioned in the meeting with party ministers called by Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba.

In a meeting attended by party

vice-chairman, general minister, chief whip, and whip, Khadka informed that a decision has been taken to stop the investment partnership process of the two projects.

Fresh tender issued for Jagadulla Hydropower Project

A fresh tender has been issued for the Jagadulla Hydropower Project, which is set to be developed in Mudkechula Rural Municipality, Dolpa. According to Sanjay Sapkota, the CEO of the company, the tender is valued at Rs 16 billion.

The original tender for civil and hydro-mechanical works was issued on June 2 last year, and seven companies submitted bids, including a joint venture between High Himalayan Hydro and AJI Company, Zhongding International, Patel Engineering, and Lama Construction. However, none of the companies passed the technical evaluation during the bidding process.

The run-of-river project has a capacity to generate 106 megawatts of electricity and is expected to be completed within five years of starting.

The project achieved financial closure in the third week of May, with Nabil Bank leading the consortium with an investment of Rs 4.4 billion. Other consortium members include the Hydroelectricity Investment and Development Company Ltd (HIDCL), the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF), Laxmi

Sunrise, and Everest Bank.

HIDCL and EPF will each invest Rs 4 billion, Laxmi Sunrise will contribute Rs 2 billion, and Everest Bank will invest Rs 1.5 billion. The total project cost is estimated at Rs 23 billion, with Rs 16 billion to be financed through loans and Rs 7 billion raised as equity.

The power purchase agreement (PPA) for the project was signed with the Nepal Electricity Authority on May 10. An access road to the project site is currently under construction, and nine Bailey bridges are being constructed as part of the



roadwork. Most of the preparatory works are now in the final stages.

Damage Control

Facing controversy one after another and pushing the Nepal Electricity sector to the brink of collapse, Energy Minister Khadka and his advisor planned damage control efforts.

Expressing open displeasure over his activities, Minister Khadka called a meeting last week with representatives of Nepal's development partners. However, the damage control efforts ended as a fiasco.

As he attended the meeting without full preparation, Minister Khadka was unable to articulate what he wants from Nepal's development partners and what his plans are for the future in generation, transmission, and distribution.

Having served for a decade as the head of the foreign division for the export of electricity to India and promoting Nepal-India energy synergy, the current expert advisor to Minister Khadka switched his stance, saying Nepal needs to expand its domestic market rather than export to India. Addressing the Independent Power Producers'

meeting, the expert reversed his earlier stance to align with PM KP Sharma Oli's position.

Minister Khadka in donor Meet

Minister Khadka, delivering a prepared speech, called on donor agencies to

invest in the hydropower sector. He engaged in discussions with the leaders and representatives of donor agencies to secure the necessary investment for generating 28,500 MW of electricity by 2035. Minister Khadka emphasized the significance of the recently approved 'Energy Development Roadmap-2081' aimed at achieving the target of 28,500 MW of electricity by 2035.

The Minister expressed gratitude to the donor agencies for their support in the development of Nepal's energy sector and encouraged them to continue their assistance in the future. He highlighted the po-

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tential of the energy development roadmap to position Nepal as a regional energy hub, enhance national and cross-border infrastructure, and drive economic growth.

Minister Khadka stressed the importance of the roadmap in ensuring energy security, sustainability, and inclusive economic progress. He underscored the roadmap's focus on the development of cross-border transmission lines in addition to generation and distribution.

The Minister expressed confidence in the timely completion of the Upper Arun Reservoir Project, supported by the World Bank, and the Dudhkoshi Reservoir Project, backed by the Asian Development Bank. He

called on development partners, international diplomatic missions, international organizations, and the community to collaborate in implementing the roadmap designed for the country's economic advancement.

He said that there would be no problem in meeting the electricity generation target set by the government as 11,161 MW of power purchase agreements (PPAs) have been signed and 12,968 MW of PPAs are in the process of being signed.

Ghising's Presentation

As usual, MD Ghising was direct and clear in his policy presentation

and assessment of the country's energy situation. Reluctantly invited by Minister Khadka and his advisor, MD Ghising made his points clearly. During the meeting, MD Ghising outlined NEA's current role and future planning in a concise manner.

A representative from a donor agency mentioned that they found Minister Khadka's speech and statements difficult to understand



due to long sentences and technical jargon. The Minister appeared embarrassed when MD Ghising presented a clear message and outlook on Nepal's energy situation.

MD Ghising, the Managing Director of the Nepal Electricity Authority, emphasized the authority's focus on constructing reservoir-based projects to achieve the targets outlined in the energy development roadmap.

He also expressed appreciation for the support provided by donor agencies in Nepal's electricity development.

Country Director of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for Nepal,

Arnaud Cauchois, expressed his commitment to continue supporting the development of Nepal's energy sector in the coming days to fulfill the goals of the Energy Development Roadmap set by the government. He said that such programs will help improve the economies of South Asian countries.

Heads and representatives of donor agencies, including the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World

Bank, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Norwegian Embassy, and others were present in the meeting. Min-

ister for Energy, Water Resources, and Irrigation, Deepak Khadka, has urged donor agencies to invest in the hydropower sector.

Energy Minister Khadka held discussions with heads and representatives of donor agencies today to gather investment after a cabinet meeting held on December 31, 2024, passed the 'Energy Development Roadmap-2081' with an objective of producing 28,500 megawatts of electricity by 2035 in Nepal.

Whatever damage control steps the minister takes now, his actions and obstruction have pushed Nepal's energy sector backward.

SOUTH KOREAN SPECIAL ENVOY VISITS NEPAL

Gesture of Goodwill

Following the conclusion of the visit to Nepal by the Special Envoy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Korea, discussions were held between Nepal and Korea on bilateral cooperation.

By A CORRESPONDENT

As Nepal and Korea mark 50 years of diplomatic ties, recent significant exchanges have included a foreign ministerial meeting during the UN General Assembly last year and the visit of Damodar Bhandari, Minister of Industry, Commerce, and Supplies of Nepal to Korea last month.

During the exchange of visits between the two countries, Lee Jeongkyu, the Special Envoy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, visited Nepal and met with Bishnu Prasad Paudel, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance; Sharat Singh Bhandari, Minister of Labour, Employment, and Social Security; and Amrit Bahadur Rai, Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Tuesday to explore ways to strengthen bilateral cooperation.

Sustained high-level exchanges between the two countries on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations were acknowledged during the meeting, including the foreign ministerial meeting held on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly last year and the visit of Honorable Mr. Damodar Bhandari, Minister of Industry, Commerce, and Supplies of Nepal to Korea last month. They agreed to continue such exchanges in the future

They both affirmed their dedication to enhancing collaboration in the fields of economy, development cooperation, employment, and tourism.

They committed to utilizing the Korea-Nepal Trade and Investment Promotion Framework (TIPF) signed in December of the previous year to boost bilateral trade, investment, and industrial cooperation, while also backing Korean companies operating in Nepal. Additionally, they agreed to strengthen employment cooperation through the Employment Permit System (EPS) and to bolster development cooperation and people-to-people exchanges.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1974, Korea and Nepal have fostered a robust and amicable partnership across various sectors, including development, econo-

my, employment, and tourism, supported by extensive human interactions over the past five decades.

Korea has consistently identified Nepal as a priority partner country for Official Development Assistance (ODA) for 15 consecutive years, focusing on critical areas such as agriculture, health, vocational training, and climate change.

Moreover, Korean corporations like Samsung Electronics and Hyundai Motor have



made significant contributions to Nepal's manufacturing sector by establishing assembly plants in the country. Korea has also made substantial investments in Nepal's energy industry, including the Upper Trishuli-1 Hydroelectric Project.

Since the signing of the Korea-Nepal EPS MOU in 2007, more than 110,000 Nepali workers have found employment in Korea, benefiting the economic progress of both nations. The Korean government is also aiding in reintegration programs for returning migrant workers to support entrepreneurship and resettlement in Nepal.

The visit by Korea's Special Envoy highlights the Korean government's firm commitment to reviewing the past 50 years of friendly cooperation with Nepal and strengthening its partnership with Nepal as a key partner country for the next 50 years of mutual growth and collaboration, according to the statement.

The delegation, led by Special Envoy Lee Jeongkyu, is also set to visit Korean business

operations and development cooperation projects during their time in Nepal.

Regarding the TIP Agreement, both parties expressed a joint dedication to enhancing cooperation in the areas of economy, development cooperation, employment, and tourism. They agreed to utilize the Korea-Nepal Trade and Investment Promotion Framework (TIPF) signed in December of the previous year to boost bilateral trade, investment, and industrial cooperation while continuing to support Korean companies' activities in Nepal. Additionally, they committed to strengthening

employment cooperation through the Employment Permit System (EPS) and enhancing development cooperation and people-to-people exchanges.

Since establishing diplomatic relations in 1974, Korea and Nepal have fostered a robust and amicable partnership in various sectors, including development, economy, employment, and tourism, supported by close human interactions over the past five decades.

Korea has designated Nepal as a priority partner country for Official Development Assistance (ODA) for 15 consecutive years, focusing on key areas such as agriculture, health, vocational training, and climate change.

Furthermore, Korean companies like Samsung Electronics and Hyundai Motor have made significant contributions to Nepal's manufacturing industry by establishing assembly plants in the country. Korea has also invested heavily in the energy sector, including the Upper Trishuli-1 Hydroelectric Project.

The visit of Korea's Special Envoy highlights the government's strong commitment to reflecting on the past 50 years of cooperation with Nepal and strengthening the partnership for the next 50 years of growth and collaboration. During their visit, the delegation, led by Special Envoy Lee Jeongkyu, also toured Korean business operations and development projects in Nepal.

Over Five Decades Of Concern On Air Pollution



BY: BATU UPRETY

Frequent news on air pollution and its impact on human health in the Kathmandu Valley in the recent days called for recalling national concerns, willingness, commitments, and actions taken to reduce multiple source-based air pollution. Nepal's concerns on air pollution dates to over half-a-century. This note reminds us of our concerns, commitments, initiatives and self-experience about deteriorating air quality in the Kathmandu Valley as I spent over five decades for study and work in this city.

Nepal's National Report, prepared for the UN Conference on Human Environment, held at Stockholm, Sweden from 5 to 16 June 1972, documented that Kathmandu is experiencing "some pollution from exhaust smoke" and "is in the process of being solved by traffic facilities and regulations"; and "stricter traffic regulations are now being codified to control motorised traffic". Regarding pollution control from the cement factory, the report mentioned "the cement factory ... has been required to attach an electrostatic precipitator unit at the additional cost of about Rs. 2.5 million to safeguard the surrounding air and land from pollution". It was the Himal Cement Factory which was established in 1967 in Chovar and shut down in 2002. In reality, it installed filters to arrest its dust emission, and pollution was one of the reasons for its shut down.

After two decades, Nepal shared another National Report, prepared for the UN Conference on Environment and Development, held at Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. The report informed the international community that "the emission from the increasing number of vehicles, brick kilns and cement factories result in a thick layer of smog over the Valley throughout the year except during the monsoon". It committed to develop a more comprehensive strategy on allowable standards on air, including other pollution, by covering major polluting sources.

After half-a-decade of the Rio Summit, Nepal published officially the State of the Environment (SoE) report on the occasion of the World Environment Day in June 1998 for the first time by using PSIR (pressure-state-impact-response)

framework and it informed total suspended particulates and particulate matter (PM10) in Kathmandu exceed the WHO guidelines. It also mentioned increase in air pollution due to use of low octane, high content of lead and carbon in fossil fuels, and poor vehicle maintenance. The SoE reports were published in 2000, and sector SoEs in 2001 (Agriculture and Forestry), 2003 (Rural Energy) and 2004 (Eco-tourism) officially. In 2001, the then Ministry of Population and Environment (MoPE) joined UNEP and ICIMOD to publish a comprehensive SoE report of Nepal with support from NORAD. The draft SoE of 2008 linked impact of air pollution with economy and human health from particulate matter, increase in medical cost and lost productivity cost. The estimated health cost attributed to urban air pollution was over USD 21 million which was estimated to about 0.29 percent of the GDP of Nepal. The 2011 draft SoE considered rapid urbanisation, industrialisation and growing number of vehicles, and more demand for fossil fuel as key pressures to air pollution and stated Kathmandu Valley heavily polluted from particulates (TSP, PM10 and PM2.5), and linked to economy and human health. It reported over 4,700 people hospitalised annually due to air pollution, while emergency room visits were at around 93,400. The drafting of SoE reports continued annually till 2011 but they were not published officially from 2005 onwards.

Google search informs that "the Air Quality Life Index, 2023 report has found that air pollution has been shortening lives by 6.8 years in nine districts with the highest concentration of particulate pollution" (<https://thehimalayantimes.com/environment/air-pollution-shortening-lives-by-68-years-report>). This is self-explaining the decline in air quality and its impact on human health in the Valley.

National needs and international commitments and proven effects of air pollutants on human health along with policy and legal provisions, and institutional development stimulated Nepal to further engage in air quality improvement activities and introduce 'green sticker' to vehicles. The government issued Nepal Vehicle Mass Emission Standard (BS 2056) and revised Standard in BS 2069. The years 1999-

2000 can be considered a ‘golden year’ to issue standards and stop registration of ‘two-stroke engine’ with a view to improve air quality under the leadership of Hon. Minister for Population and Environment, Mr. Bhakta Bahadur Balaayar, popularly recalled as the ‘tempo minister’ who also led to stop movement of diesel operated three-wheelers and introduced ‘microbuses’ in the Valley. After nearly 4 years, the government issued National Ambient Air Quality Standard, 2060 (2003) which was revised and re-issued in 2012. Standards were issued chimney height of industries including emission standard and stack height for brick industry to reduce air pollution.

Prior to the establishment of the Department of Environment, air quality management plan was developed. The department assessed source-based air pollution and total emission load from various sources such as transport, industry, agriculture and domestic sources, reviewed relevant policies and laws, and prepared an integrated urban air quality framework, including strategies and action plan on ambient air quality management in the Kathmandu Valley in June 2017.

In 2019, the government launched three pillars (pollution control, sanitation and waste management, and greenery promotion) ‘Nepal clean environment campaign’ (mahaabhiyan) with an action plan. The plan includes number of activities along with promoting e-vehicle use, establishing charging stations, and enforcing Euro-4 or equivalent standard etc.

In 2020, the government approved the Kathmandu Valley Air Quality Management Action Plan (2076) with specific focus on pollution source-based actions to improve air quality in the Valley with a view to ensuring fundamental right to live in a clean and healthy environment. Several activities have been included in the action plan that range from the establishment of the emission test and fitness centers and compliance of emission standards to the establishment of charging stations for EVs, legal provisions to convert old vehicles to EVs, and implementation of mobile emission monitoring system.

This Action Plan provisions to constitute a multistakeholder Coordination Committee under the chair of the Minister for Forests and Environment for coordination and policy

guidance to implement and review the actions and Action Plan Implementation Committee under the chair of the Secretary of the Ministry of Forests and Environment. Effective implementation of the Action Plan is expected to, inter alia, ensure: (i) fundamental right of the Nepali people to live in a clean and healthy environment; (ii) compliance to the National Air Quality Standard; (iii) decline in air pollution-induced diseases; and (iv) contribution to economic development and meet relevant Sustainable Development Goals. Pollution control, including air quality improvement in the Valley was a major concern when environment and pollution control activities were initiated in Nepal.

Two years back, the Department of Environment analysed the sources of pollution from 11 monitoring stations and confirmed never compliance with the standard for PM2.5 concentration. The annual report on Nepal’s air quality status, published in 2022 by the department informs “PM2.5

is so minute that it can enter lungs and cause various respiratory-related diseases”. It calls for taking urgent actions to control air pollution and protect human health. Several communicating channels have been used to inform people on air quality in the Valley. A newspaper on 14 January 2025 wrote air quality of the Valley ‘very unhealthy’.

This reviewed “paper” commitment clearly indicates concerns of the govern-

ment towards improving air quality of the Valley. There is no dearth of policy, legal provisions or actions which open multiple opportunities to tackle this threat and risk with multi-stakeholders’ participation and support. What is lacking now is the implementation of the existing policies, legal provisions, standards, and agreed actions.

Nepal is widely known as a country with ‘good paper policies and plans’ and their weak implementation for the last five decades. Taking note of the state of air pollution and response measures without field level actions, local governments are encouraged to come forward and intervene sources of air pollution to the earliest possible and help people survive with their ‘functional lungs’. Recalling air quality during the last 3 to 5 decades and its present state in the Valley, the government may wish to import handy ‘oxygen-cylinders and/or respirators’ to meet the needs of an increasing number of victims from air-pollution.





FAST TRACK

Moving In The Right Direction

Despite facing several obstacles and a lack of adequate budget, the Kathmandu-Tarai/Madhes Expressway Project is currently on the right track. During an inspection visit by President Ram Chandra Paudel, the Nepal Army reported that the project has made progress with 37.56 per cent completion.

By A CORRESPONDENT

The construction work on the Kathmandu-Tarai/Madhes Expressway (Fast Track) is progressing well, with over 37.56 percent completion. President Ramchandra Paudel visited various locations under the construction of the Kathmandu-Tarai/Madhes Expressway project.

During the visit, the President was briefed on the project's progress and had an aerial view of the under-construction tunnel, bridge, and slope protection in Lendanda and Dhedre, as well as other project locations.

Chief of Army Staff (CoAS)

Ashok Raj Sigdel, Head of the Project, other senior army officers, the Chief District Officer of Makwanpur District, and others were present during the visit.

The Kathmandu-Tarai/Madhes Expressway project consists of 13 different packages, with 7 tunnels out of 12 packages currently under construction. Two tunnels in Dhedre and Lendanda have been completed.

Additionally, 65 percent of the Mahadevtar tunnel has been

completed, construction work on the Chandrambhir tunnel has commenced, and the design and preliminary preparation of the other 3 tunnels are in progress.

Out of the 89 bridges in the Kathmandu-Tarai/Madhes Expressway Road Project, 80 are currently under construction and 5 have been completed.

The overall physical progress of the project is at 37.60 percent, with a financial progress of 39.56 percent.

The Kathmandu–Tarai–Madhes Fast Track, managed by the Nepal Army, has achieved a 37 per cent progress in seven years.

According to Brigadier General Gaurav Kumar KC, the project's physical progress as of mid-January in the current fiscal year 2024/25 is at 37.60 percent, with financial progress, including project mobilization, at 39.56 percent. Currently, 12 out of the 13 construction packages (packages No. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8(a), 8(b), 9(a), 9(b), and 10) are in the construction and implementation phase. The procurement process for Package No. 11, which covers the Khokana–Bungamati section, has not started yet due to unresolved land acquisition issues.



The fast track project includes seven tunnels with a total length of 10.979 km, where construction work is progressing rapidly.

The Nepali Army reported that in Package No. 1, the Mahadevtar Tunnel has a total length of 3,355 meters. Of this, 2,228 meters (68 percent) of the right tunnel and 2,020 meters

(61 percent) of the left tunnel have been excavated.

In Package No. 2, the Dhedre Tunnel, with a total length of 1,691 meters, has achieved breakthroughs in both the left tunnel (1,728 meters) and the right tunnel (1,653 meters) heading towards Kathmandu from Nijgadhi.

Significant progress has been made in the twin tunnels located at Lendanda in Bakaiya and Gadhi Rural Municipalities of Makwanpur under Package 3.

The 1,623-meter-long tunnel from Nijgadhi to Kathmandu was completed in the Nepali month of Ashad, while the 1,633-meter-long tunnel from Kathmandu to Nijgadhi was completed in Jestha.

Package No. 4, which includes the 1,000-meter Deuichaur Tunnel, and Package No. 5, which includes the 390-meter Sisautar Tunnel, are currently in the design phase after procurement





agreements.

Portal preparation work for the 2,250-meter Chandram Bhir Tunnel in Package No. 6 is ongoing, and the 583-meter Mauri Bhir Tunnel in Package No. 7 is in the design phase following procurement agreements.

Out of the 89 planned bridges, procurement agreements have been signed for the construction of 85 bridges. Currently, five bridges in the Rajdamar area of Bakaiya, Makwanpur, have been completed. Construction work is ongoing for various types of bridges at different locations, with some reaching heights of up to 81 meters.

Regarding land acquisition, the approved Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Supplementary Environmental Impact Assessment (SEIA) indicate that approximately 17,651 ropanis of land are needed for the project. Out of this, 5,487 ropanis are privately owned.

Notices have been issued for the acquisition of 5,204 ropanis of private land, with 4,818 ropanis already acquired. The price for 203 ropanis in the Khokana-Bungamati section has been determined, but compensation distribution is pending. Valuation for 165 ropanis is still in progress, totaling approximately 368 ropanis of remaining land.



Additionally, 16 ropanis need to be acquired in Makwanpur district and four ropanis in Kathmandu district. The Nepal Army has reported the cutting of 36,179 trees, with 705,552 saplings planted as compensation. It has been stated that additional land acquisition and tree felling

outside the predetermined right-of-way have been approved as per the supplementary Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), in line with adjustments and modifications made during construction and revised design alignments.

According to the supplementary Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report, land acquisition and tree felling approvals for the Mahadevtar, Dhedre and Lendanda sections (from 26 km to 35 km) and the Rajdamar, Bagdev and Nijgadh sections (from 49 km to 70 km) were obtained on December 28, 2023.

The Nepali Army has confirmed that the tree-cutting has been completed and the land transfer process is currently in progress.

The supplementary Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report for the Ranisera

and Budune sections of the expressway (from 35 km to 49 km) was approved by a ministerial-level decision of the Ministry of Forests and Environment on April 19, 2024.

The process for tree cutting and land usage rights approval is ongoing, with construction work including sub-base preparation, bio-engineering, roadside structures, wall construction, and service roads progressing quickly. Additionally, according to a Cabinet decision of the Nepal Government on September 5, 2024, approval was granted to use 51.871 hectares of national forest land in Makwanpurgadhi Rural Municipality-1, Hetauda Sub-metropolitan City-18, and Bakaiya Rural Municipality-5 in Makwanpur district under Subsection (10) of Section 42 of the Forest Act, 2076.

The approval also permitted the cutting of 27,748 trees/poles of different species, with



4,225 trees already felled. The Kathmandu-Terai-Madhes Fast Track, which spans 70.977 kilometers, begins in Khokana and ends in Nijgadh, Bara.

The project was initially handed over to the Nepali Army in 2017 by the government under then Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' with a completion target of four years. Originally scheduled for completion by 2023/24, the deadline was extended to 2027 when

it became clear that the original timeline could not be met.

Initially budgeted at Rs. 175 billion, the project's cost has now risen to Rs. 211.93 billion. The project involves collaboration between six Chinese companies and Nepali construction firms.

Once finished, the fast track is expected to reduce travel time from Terai to Kathmandu by four hours and save over Rs. 50 billion annually in transportation costs.



Despite facing numerous challenges and obstacles from various sectors, the Nepal Army has now managed to get the construction work back on track, raising hopes that it will be completed within the specified timeframe. To achieve this, the government and political parties need to support the land acquisition issue in the Khokana areas.



BEEN

Ensuring Energy-Efficient Building Design

By A CORRESPONDENT

Studies indicate that buildings account for more than one-third of Nepal's total energy consumption, a figure that is on the rise due to increasing incomes, extreme temperatures, and urbanization. As Nepal's building footprint expands, the country has the opportunity to prioritize energy efficiency and reduce emissions.

Current buildings in Nepal exhibit high operational energy usage, with heating and cooling accounting for 60 percent of energy consumption in modern structures. The building stock in

Nepal also has a significant environmental impact.

Recent data from the Nepal Electricity Authority reveals a rapid increase in electricity consumption in households across all regions. To manage electricity supply to households, NEA has implemented four-hour load shedding during peak times.

"Despite improvements in electricity supply, we are forced to implement power cuts to industries during the peak four hours," stated Chandan Kumar Ghosh, NEA spokesperson. Winter electricity demand has surged by nearly 20

percent compared to last year, with peak demand reaching approximately 1800 MW."

The second National Determined Contribution (NDC) highlights sectors with increased energy demand and stresses the importance of adaptation and mitigation. It suggests using low-emission technologies in industries like brick and cement to reduce coal consumption and air pollution.

Dr. Maheshwor Dhakal, head of the Climate Change Management Division, noted that the building sector is a significant carbon emitter. The second NDC report

focuses on ensuring new buildings comply with energy efficiency measures. The Climate Change Management Division is enhancing coordination among stakeholders through meetings. The Ministry of Urban Development is creating mandatory energy-efficient guidelines for new public construction.

The NDC also promotes designing energy-efficient buildings, but implementation is challenging. Nepal aims for zero emissions by 2045 and has already submitted its NDC. T

he Ministry of Urban Development and the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction are holding consultations on energy-efficient buildings at the federal level to achieve the zero emissions target by 2045.

Binu Bajracharya Kunwar, spokesperson for the Ministry of Urban Development, stated that the Ministry is currently developing policy guidelines for public buildings, as the approval of private building designs is under the jurisdiction of local governments.

The BUILDING Energy Efficiency in Nepal (BEEN) project, funded by the European Union under the SWITCH-Asia Program and led by the University of Innsbruck, Austria (UIBK), in collaboration with MinErgy Pvt

Ltd, Nepal, Greentech Knowledge Solution Pvt Ltd, India, and Asociacion Espanola de Normalizacion (UNE) Spain, has been operating in 60 municipalities across Bagmati, Gandaki, and Lumbini Provinces for the past three years. The project provides technical support to develop energy-efficient building guidelines.

Among the 60 municipalities, 21 have already implemented energy-efficient building codes for new constructions, including Pokhara Metropolitan City and

Lalitpur Metropolitan City.

BEEN's approach is appropriate as the Constitution of Nepal authorizes local governments to approve private building constructions. The organization has signed MoUs with numerous municipalities, and any major decision by the federal government can lead to significant changes. In December 2024, BEEN signed an MoU with the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction (DUDBC).

The MoU was signed by Prakrina Tuladhar, Deputy Director General of DUDBC, and BEEN's team leader Suyesh Prajapati in the presence of Jose Luis Vinuesa-Santamaria, Head of Cooperation, Delegation of the European Union to Nepal.

The European Union Nepal highlighted the significance of this milestone on its Facebook page, emphasizing the promotion of energy-efficient buildings in the country. Jose Luis Vinuesa-Santamaria's presence and discussions during the signing ceremony between the BEEN project and DUDBC inspired the project team.

The European Union is committed to supporting the DUDBC in implementing energy-efficient green building initiatives and developing policy guidelines.

The partnership has been welcomed by Er Machakaji Maharjan, Director-General of DUDBC, who expressed gratitude for the collaboration. He expects the partnership to lead to significant progress in DUDBC's history. The goal of the partnership is to create a policy environment that promotes energy-efficient building design and construction at the national level.

Energy-efficient buildings are crucial for sustainability efforts, as outlined in the second NDC.



Green buildings not only reduce energy costs but also have a lower carbon footprint. By utilizing renewable energy sources, they decrease reliance on coal-powered plants and help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Suyesh Prajapati, Team Leader of BEEN, stated, “Our objective is to promote low-carbon and resource-efficient construction in Nepal’s construction sector by facilitating the development, construction, and renovation of environmentally friendly buildings.” The MoU signed with DUDBC will play a significant role in expediting this process.

Prajapati highlighted the success of BEEN in promoting energy efficiency at both local and national levels. Out of 60 local governments, 50 have started the process of adopting energy efficiency agendas through by-laws.

BEEN has conducted training sessions for over 200 technical staff from these municipalities to enhance their capacity.

As a result, 125 energy-efficient buildings have been constructed with BEEN’s support in these areas. Additionally, more than 250 Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) from various

sectors have received training to offer energy-efficient services and products.

The demand for floor space and energy-consuming services like lighting, air conditioning, and computers is increasing rapidly. A study predicts that Nepal’s floor space will quadruple by 2050, mirroring global trends in building stock growth.

Achieving the zero-emission goal by 2045 is impossible without

construction, transport, and mobility. The second NDC also focuses on promoting climate-responsive building designs and retrofitting.

The Challenge:

Nepal’s population is predominantly rural, but the country is experiencing rapid urbanization. It is projected that 1 million homes will be built in Nepal over the next decade. Additionally, significant growth is expected in the tourism and hospitality sector, as well as in commercial buildings.

In recent years, the demand for space in the market has led to buildings being designed without taking into account the local climate. This has resulted in high energy consumption for heating and cooling, contributing to the overall increase in op-

erational energy requirements in Nepal’s urban areas. Additionally, the use of building materials with high embodied energy has further increased the carbon footprint of the building sector in Nepal.

It is crucial to reduce energy consumption in buildings, but Nepal currently lacks standards, guidelines, or regulations for energy-efficient building design in new construction or retrofitting



drastically reducing energy consumption in buildings. Therefore, the second NDC prioritizes urban adaptation and mitigation. In this context, BEEN’s strategy is becoming more relevant, as highlighted by the recent MoU signed between the DUDBC and BEEN.

Dr. Dhakal, head of the Climate Change Management Division, emphasized that the sectors related to urban mitigation include energy consumption in house con-

existing buildings.

Awareness and capacity among building sector MSMEs regarding energy-efficient buildings and services are also low. While structural stability in buildings has been a focus in Nepal due to earthquakes, there is a lack of consideration for climate responsiveness and energy efficiency in most new building designs.

BEEN's Support

BEEN has been actively promoting climate-responsive building designs, retrofitting, and the adoption of energy-efficient space heating and cooling technologies, as well as resource-efficient building materials and renewable energy sources.

The organization has collaborated with various stakeholders to develop passive design guidelines, design tools, technical standards, and manuals for municipalities. Additionally, they have conducted training programs in partnership with local governments and related associations.

In line with the European Green Deal and the EU Circular Economy Action Plan, BEEN is advocating for circular economy strategies in the building sector.

By supporting green technolo-

gies through capacity building, policy interventions, and financial support, BEEN is facilitating the transition to a low-carbon, resource-efficient, and circular building sector.

BEEN's efforts align with national commitments to climate change mitigation, recognizing the significant role of the building sector in achieving sustainability goals.

Implementing building energy codes, appliance standards, and



retrofitting policies can help cities and countries ensure long-term energy efficiency in buildings.

As Nepal aims to mandate net-zero energy buildings in their codes by 2045 or earlier, policy-level interventions in building construction are crucial for achieving this goal.

Nepal is among the 53 countries that emphasize building energy efficiency in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). The country specifically highlights building energy codes, underscoring the significance of

energy efficiency in the climate future.

Nepal's NDCs outline various strategies to maximize building energy efficiency potential, such as implementing energy codes for new and existing buildings, setting appliance standards, establishing energy efficiency resource standards, introducing rating systems, setting renovation targets, and defining energy consumption goals.

Following the Paris Agreement negotiations, Nepal has shown a renewed commitment to building energy efficiency policies. Effective coordination is crucial for the

successful implementation of NDCs. While the Ministry of Forest and Environment is responsible for developing the NDC and related plans, other ministries and local governments play a significant role in overseeing construction and policy implementation.

Achieving climate goals related to building energy use is more feasible when local governments receive support from national governments in terms of financial resources and tools.

चिसोमा हुने स्वास्थ्य समस्याबाट बचाँ

- चिसोबाट बालबालिका र ज्येष्ठ नागरिक बढी प्रभावित हुने हुँदा उनिहरूको उचित स्याहार गरौं,
- चिसोमा बाहिर हिड्दा तातो र न्यानो कपडा लगाऔं,
- कोठामा हिटर वा आगो वाल्दा होसियारी अपनाऔं,
- चिसोबाट जोगिन दैनिक घाम ताप्ने गरौं,
- शारिरिक व्यायाम गरौं,
- जाडोबाट बच्ने नाममा धुम्रपान र मद्यमान नगरौं,
- रुघाखोकी, ज्वरो लगायतका स्वास्थ्य समस्या देखिएमा स्वास्थ्य परीक्षण गरौं र गराऔं ।



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Green Future Savings Account

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वातावरणमैत्री आयोजनामा
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*शर्मा राना, हुलेका



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