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## VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1, JANUARY 2021



**Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA)**

Tripureshwor, Kathmandu

Nepal



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# **Journal of Foreign Affairs**

## VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1, JANUARY 2021

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## Foreword

The Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA) is pleased to bring out the *Journal of Foreign Affairs* as its key think-tank activity. The IFA family was engaged in activities relevant for the publication to materialize the desired outcome. The effort put in so far was successful in laying down the foundation by providing an impetus to future activities to facilitate continued publication of the journal. However, in the course of the publication work, we felt the deficit in necessary human and financial resources. IFA realises the need for a reliable network of researchers, experts and academics in contributing to the publication. As is known to all, health risks and a barrier to movement imposed by the outbreak of COVID-19 left its telling effect on the publication.

Despite the obstacles and challenges faced, the outcome, we feel, will help academics and stakeholder institutions and enhance the purpose of IFA. The primary and foremost duty of the Institute is to assist the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nepal in its discharge of effectively conducting foreign policy practices and understanding.

Finally, the Institute extends its deep gratitude to Honourable Foreign Minister Mr Pradeep Kumar Gyawali and the authorities within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of Nepal for their inspiring support and enabling assistance offered.

**Rajesh Shrestha**

Executive Director  
Institute of Foreign Affairs  
Tripureswor, Kathmandu

# Editorial

Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA) presents the maiden issue of the *Journal of Foreign Affairs* (JoFA). International Relations are in the process of being restructured through the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The recent trajectories in the geopolitical sphere forced every nation to develop different diplomatic and strategic structures and models of cooperation. The existing relationships between the countries are being gradually altered and will be transforming geopolitically, economically and diplomatically. Equally, there is also an important aspect to build external outreach to secure support for the economic development of Nepal. Against this backdrop, it is essential to revisit Nepal's foreign policy in the neighbourhood, beyond the neighbourhood, and also on the regional and multilateral fronts. We hope that the *Journal of Foreign Affairs* fulfills that objective.

The *Journal of Foreign Affairs* followed a double-blind peer review process where the identity of authors and reviewers was kept confidential. The review generally involved two to four subject experts. JoFA mainly concentrates on the realm of Foreign Policy, International Relations, International Political Economy, Security and Strategic Affairs and Diplomacy. This issue, in particular, focuses on a wide range of concerns, including the strategies for border management, identifying actors in the foreign policy decision-making, conducting economic diplomacy, diversification of diplomatic maneuverings, Nepal's participation in UN peacekeeping missions and efforts to revive the SAARC, the importance of regime capability in diplomatic maneuverings, examining the relationships between labour diplomacy and migration governance, and Nepal's soft power capabilities. This issue has also incorporated a biography of the late Diplomat Yadu Nath Khanal and a book review of '*Nepal Worldview*'.

The *Journal of Foreign Affairs* is the upshot of the realization of the research gaps in the aforementioned fields. To fulfill these research gaps, IFA sought the assistance of the foreign policy experts, planners, academicians, researchers and journalists. Each paper, in this journal, is a contribution to the understanding of the changing dynamics of Nepal's foreign policy at the bilateral, multilateral and regional levels. This volume explores intensively into certain major issues of Nepal's foreign relations and the contemporary challenges faced by Nepal's diplomacy.

The *Journal of Foreign Affairs* is the result of the untiring efforts of the IFA Board members, and the invaluable feedbacks received from foreign policy experts, policy analysts, security experts, academicians, diplomats and researchers. IFA is thankful to all the contributors, peer-reviewers and copyeditors. In this context, the Executive Editors acknowledge the support and assistance of Mr Gyan Chandra Acharya, Mr Arjun Bahadur Thapa, Dr Dinesh Raj Bhujju, Mr Bijaya Lal Shrestha, Dr Ram Thapaliya, Dr Nischal Nath Pandey, Dr Naresh Nath Rimal, Mr Geja Sharma Wagle, Dr Jeevan Baniya, Dr Chandra Lal Pandey, Dr Purna Silwal, Mr. Prachanda Man Shrestha, Mr Suresh Sharma, Mr Ghanshyam Bhandari, Mr Sushil K. Lamsal, Mr Rambabu Dhakal. Moreover, we are thankful for the dedication and commitment of IFA officials Mr Matrika Poudyal, Mr Mahendra Prasad Joshi, Ms Binita Shrestha, Mr Sanuraja Puri, Mr Dron Lamichhane and all other supporting staff.

**Executive Editors**

**Journal of Foreign Affairs (JoFA)**

**Institute of Foreign Affairs**



# **Journal of Foreign Affairs**

Volume 1, Issue 1, January 2021

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Regime Capability and Relational Stakes in the Emerging World Order <i>ANAND ADITYA</i>	1-36
Diplomacy in the Perspective of Boundaries <i>BUDDHI NARAYAN SHRESTHA</i>	37-58
Economic Diplomacy for Development Partnership <i>RAJENDRA SHRESTHA</i>	59-78
Charting a New Direction and Strategy in Nepal's Foreign Policy <i>NISCHAL NATH PANDEY</i>	79-90
Unleashing Nepal's Demography as Soft Power <i>SUJEEV SHAKYA</i>	91-106
Labour Diplomacy and Migration Governance in Nepal <i>KESHAV BASHYAL and BINITA SUBEDI</i>	107-122
Ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' in Nepal's Contribution to UN Peacekeeping Operations <i>GAURAV BHATTARAI and BEENITA NEPALI</i>	123-150
Nepal's Post-Pandemic Diplomacy <i>JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI</i>	151-170
Nepal's Role in Strengthening SAARC <i>KAMAL DEV BHATTARAI</i>	171-188
Capitalising Nepal's Soft Power Heritage in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century <i>AMISH RAJ MULMI</i>	189-206
An Intellectual in the Corridors of Power <i>Biography by JAYA RAJ ACHARYA</i>	207-218
Nepal Worldview : Foreign Policy and Diplomacy <i>Book Review by RUDRA NEPAL</i>	219-237



# REGIME CAPABILITY AND RELATIONAL STAKES IN THE EMERGING WORLD ORDER

## Lessons for Nepal

■ Anand Aditya

### Abstract

*Against the background of an emerging new world order in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this paper offers a conceptual frame on the critical role that regime capability can play in modulating the relational stakes of a country. The text in that context offers the case of Nepal as also a few other countries to assess and explain the role and impact of political stability in enhancing the relational dividend as well as the pace of democratisation and development. A three-fold typology of governance regimes-survival, subsistential and self-sustaining-is also presented to validate the arguments. The methodology used here is broadly comparative and empirical using ideas conceptualised to facilitate comparison, explanation and elaboration of the arguments forwarded in the course of discussion.*

**Keywords:** *Regime Capability, Relational Deficit, Self-sustaining Regime, Subsistential Regime, Survival Regime, Public Diplomacy*

### Setting the Context

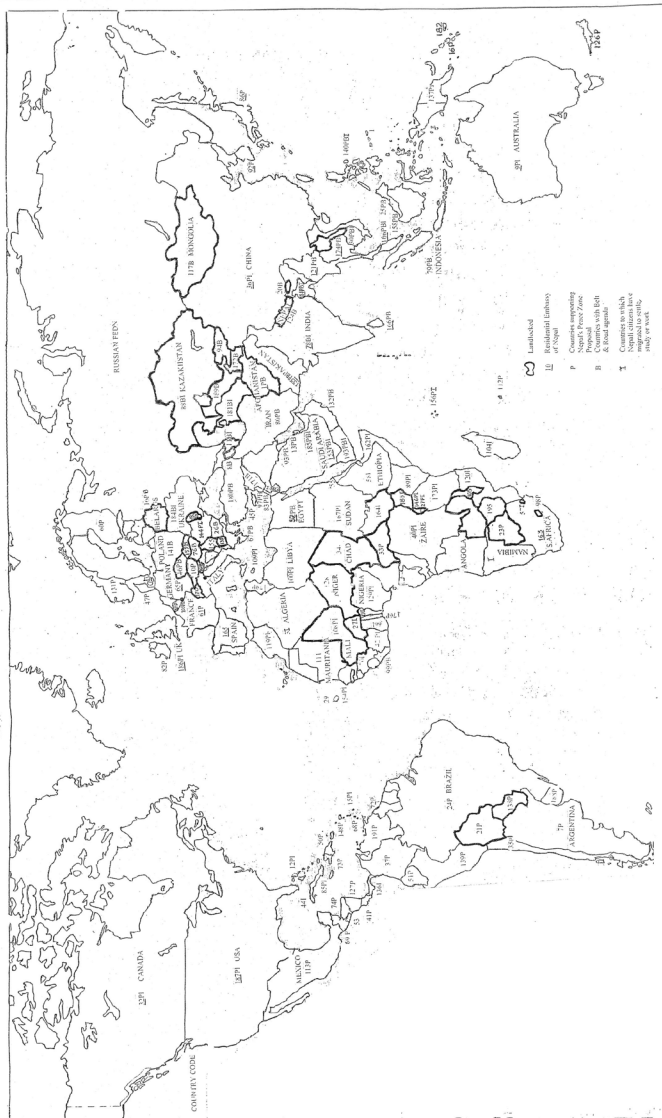
After ten cycles of political movements, twenty-four decades of dynastic rule and fifty-seven years of seemingly endless waiting, Nepal has now joined the global comity of the federal order, and the seventh constitution in the country's seven decades of transition has unfolded a new vista of political opportunities. Opportunities, however, hardly arrive alone. In their wake, they bring challenges. Every opportunity also brings its own kind of challenge, often with a complexity that demands an open mind and a fresh approach to burrow deeper to unravel the potentials hidden below.

The maddening melee of conflicts, crises and a possible catastrophe that now invades the Nepali mindset about the impending future render unfolding the potentials of the Nepali polity far more complex, making it the challenge of challenges. Lost in the multitude of crises, fearful of the conflicts threatening

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■ As a senior political analyst interested in elections, political violence, conflict and peace, R and D and South Asia, Aditya has been closely observing the new trends in international relations and diplomatic practices, and is variously engaged in grooming young scholars.

WORLD MAP SHOWING NEPAL'S RELATIONS ABROAD AND THE LANDLOCKED STATES



NEPAL'S RELATIONS ABROAD

1	Australia	67	China	11	Norway
2	Austria	68	Colombia	12	Oman
3	Bahrain	69	Costa Rica	13	Pakistan
4	Bangladesh	70	Cuba	14	Peru
5	Barbados	71	Czech Republic	15	Philippines
6	Belize	72	Denmark	16	Poland
7	Bhutan	73	Egypt	17	Portugal
8	Bolivia	74	France	18	Romania
9	Brazil	75	Germany	19	Russia
10	Burkina Faso	76	Ghana	20	Saudi Arabia
11	Burundi	77	Greece	21	Senegal
12	Canada	78	Honduras	22	Sierra Leone
13	Chad	79	India	23	Singapore
14	Chile	80	Indonesia	24	South Africa
15	China	81	Iran	25	Spain
16	Colombia	82	Italy	26	Sri Lanka
17	Costa Rica	83	Jamaica	27	Sudan
18	Cuba	84	Kenya	28	Switzerland
19	Cyprus	85	Kuwait	29	Taiwan
20	Czech Republic	86	Laos	30	Tanzania
21	Denmark	87	Lebanon	31	Togo
22	Dominican Republic	88	Libya	32	Tunisia
23	Dominican Republic	89	Mali	33	Turkey
24	Dominican Republic	90	Mexico	34	Uganda
25	Dominican Republic	91	Moldova	35	Ukraine
26	Dominican Republic	92	Morocco	36	USA
27	Dominican Republic	93	Netherlands	37	Venezuela
28	Dominican Republic	94	Nigeria	38	Zambia
29	Dominican Republic	95	North Macedonia	39	Zimbabwe
30	Dominican Republic	96	Paraguay	40	
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35	Dominican Republic	101	Russia	45	
36	Dominican Republic	102	Saudi Arabia	46	
37	Dominican Republic	103	Senegal	47	
38	Dominican Republic	104	Sierra Leone	48	
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52	Dominican Republic	118	USA	62	
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267	Dominican Republic	333		277	

the new-born republic, confused by the streams of the global process of democratisation and overwhelmed by the pressures of developmental forces, the conventional analyst stands befuddled, for which there are ample reasons.

Right since the day when the Rana patriarchy ended in Nepal, in 1950, governing regimes in Nepal have come and gone, risen and fallen like the tides of the sea, most of them without leaving a trace of what they did, how and why. In all likelihood, this happened because they could do little worth remembering. But failure often teaches more than success does. And a whole treasure of lessons may have been lost by consigning them into the oblivion of history. There is certainly no dearth of historical accounts about who came and went, when and with what sequence. But a logical explanation of the causes and consequences of their arrival and departure from the scene is missing. There is no comparative, critical study on this theme. This is surprising, particularly considering the fact that governing regimes remain the hub of all political activities; the way they play their role leaves an impact internally as well as externally with implications of crucial significance often destined to influence the destiny of the whole populace.

There is another surprise which is no less consequential. It is the huge deficit in the affairs of the national government left by failures that are both policy-based and strategic. The relational dividend that Nepal could garner with the help of a robust foreign policy remains an ideal left unpursued and abandoned. The achievements in the span of the seven decades of post-Rana governance era appear like the tip of an iceberg-almost *terra incognita*-and there is reason to ask why it has been so.

This paper seeks to fill these two gaps by offering a framework for analysing and appraising the roles of the various governing regimes in a comparative way. Divided into nine sections altogether, it has five objectives in mind. The first of them is to examine their achievements in a historic framework. The second one is to assess their role in establishing relationships near and abroad in terms of the skills essential for setting up networks in the new century. The paper argues that the core capabilities of a governing regime are intrinsically related to its relational capacity. Without the core capabilities a regime can scarcely function, and in the absence of a robust relational capacity, a regime is bound to fail. The third objective is to identify the risks inherent in the outdated mode of clandestine covenants in order to uncover the need to shift from the conventional professional club mode of diplomacy towards public diplomacy. The fourth objective tries to draw lessons for Nepal from its past and the turbulent history of three other countries-Afghanistan, Bhutan and Indonesia. The last objective is to suggest measures that improve the state's

regime capability and consolidate its relational skills to enhance the political stability of governing regimes.

Given the chronic propensity of the ruling regimes of Nepal towards acute dependence on external assistance and their decadence, most of them tend merely to survive. Such an existential risk raises the question on their very *raison d'être*, also because the relational deficit is piling up. What could explain such a state of affairs? Is this so because the governing regimes have muted into party-regimes? This exercise cannot pretend to answer all the curiosities it raises. But it does attempt to respond to some of them.

One obvious root of the confusion and chaos afflicting Nepal's political order is the political instability of the governance regimes, which is both chronic and acute. Chronic because political instability has now become an enduring feature of virtually every regime installed after 1950 and acute because that malady has seeped down vertically and laterally into every part of the body politique-legislature, executive and judiciary. The most telling indicator of political instability afflicting Nepal's governing regimes is what almost everyone knows today-not a single elected government since 1960 has so far been able to complete its tenure. Another evidence comes from Saptari, a district in the plains of the south, at the local level, which has a history of such a high turnover of its CDOs (Chief District Officers) that in four decades it witnessed no less than two scores of them. How can a government's policy be implemented in such a situation and what kind of strategy would work? Obviously, such internal instability impacts not only on the internal security of the land but also renders vulnerable the external relations.

The two key posers that are closely related to political instability are:

- How do the post-movement regimes here differ from the preceding ones in initiatives on system change, capacity for mass mobilisation and financial upliftment?
- How do the performances of the political parties and governments set up after the elections differ from their predecessors in party practice, leadership behaviour and pledge-performance gap?

Against such a background, this paper attempts to offer a conceptual frame on the role a regime can play in restructuring relations with the institutions at home and abroad and tries to test its utility in the perspective of the rise of a new world order. In that context, the paper also proposes a three-fold typology of governance regime-survival, subsistential and self-sustaining-explaining their role in reinforcing the political stability of the governing regimes and in consolidating policy continuity as also in upholding the rule of law and

rule implementation. The Webster's Unabridged Dictionary (2001) defines a 'regime' as a mode or rule of government. A governing regime, however, used in this paper, is regarded as one that has been institutionalised over time in terms of certain norms, values and principles of governance and is different from political regimes that could be classified under different categories of political ideology-authoritarian, democratic, socialist, communist or republican. The theme chosen here bears relevance not just for the democratic evolution of Nepal's developing polity but also in terms of the relational dividend that a robust regime capability can open up to enhance a state's global, regional as well as internal relations by honing up its foreign policy skills.

The conceptual frame presented in this study offers an inventory of ideas to elaborate on one central feature of the governing regimes of Nepal-their chronic instability-which has a direct bearing not just upon their relation-building capability vis-a-vis other states but also upon the twin process of this country's democratisation and development.

### **Relational Dividend vs Relational Deficit**

Statism and *Realpolitik* that followed Westphalia, two world wars and one Cold War cry today for a new paradigm of state-to-state relations. The new paradigm is now essential to address the problems of relational asymmetry whose leftovers are the Sphere of Influence approach, the nightmare of coalitions bred by the Balance of Power mechanism, *Matchpolitik*, growth fetish, bilateralism, hegemonic nationalism, terrorism, groupthink and the propensity towards contest and war for dominance between an established power and a rising one (the Thucydides Trap). State and economy combined in the old order of world relations to produce what Habermas characterises as the *statisation* of the economy and the *refeudalisation* of the state. Party joined as the third element in that nexus, and the remaining gap was filled by the military. Politics then turned to become the only game in town of these four elements producing what could be regarded as an Iron Quadrangle of sorts. The militaristic view of Von Moltke and his exclusive focus on battle in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century laid bare the blind spot in his model of civil-military relationship that failed to realise that the civil sector and the military needed to be in constant dialogue. The disconnect such a nexus brought between the military and civil strategy was not only misleading but also fatally dangerous that dominated decades of conflict and war, bringing confrontation, crisis and chaos of catastrophic proportions to states and nations for centuries.

Although the Nepali state is chronologically one of the 22 oldest on the world map, with its age superseding all regional means except the European one, it shows all the symptoms of a captive state syndrome. With chronic governmental instability, its centralised nature and virtual democracy (power to command

and coerce with little softpower to convince, bargain and exchange) combined with the proneness to conflict, crises and violence, weak rule implementation, poor leadership, low level of political capital and a fragile civic culture have rendered the state vulnerable and the nation fragile (Aditya, 2011).

The need for restructuring relations thus emerges essentially from the deficit in relations between states. The tension such a state breeds brings crises as well as catastrophes. One clear example of how relational deficit damages the agenda came recently in the failure of the political decision-makers in Nepal in the course of the second convening of the Constituent Assembly (CA)-their inability, or rather the unwillingness of the ruling regime-to comprehend the crucial significance of inter-constituency relations, and relate to the internal and external domains, the public at large and the trans-border interests. After seven years of exercise, the CA could neither generate a broad consensus on the fundamentals nor could induce mass debate in any form to educate the people on the legitimacy and broad ownership of the law of the land. Still another blunder lay in ruffling neighbourhood relations. This not only brought a months-long blockade in the south, but also polarised hill-plain relations.

Relationship, in fact, is like a chain, which is as strong as its weakest link, and there is more than one weak link in the chain of Nepal-India-China triad. The larger problem is we recognise only a small part of the intricate relations that bind the fate of these three neighbours and the destiny of almost three billion plus human mass. The relational stakes that the triad embodies remain unexplored, bogged down in the quagmire of political mythopoeia, wrong habits of hearts and minds and behavioural inertia, defined or determined by our mutual fixations and phobias that condition, contain and constrain the way we manage our neighbourhood relations. Our relational attitudes, behaviour, interactions, dialogues, discourses and decisions ignore the vast endowment of resources that the three neighbours hold together at their disposal-natural, physical and human capital-neglecting the scope for broadening that relationship and capitalising on it.

The paradigm shift from the conventional exclusionary mode of states' realpolitik-based relations, politics and diplomacy towards a more public-based one would not only make it more representative, responsible and responsive. It would immensely amplify the capacity of the country's political constituencies by transforming the traditional delegatory mode of functioning, borrowed blindly from abroad, into a more effective, efficient and distributive one, through the release of the synergy possible from the interactive plays of actors in the field.

Relational deficit can transform a brimming dispute into a crisis and can be used to manufacture history as it did in Tibet's case in and after October 1962.

Was it a clash of civilisations, as Huntington would like to claim, or a mere skirmish of two ruling regimes?

The breach that the collision brought in the millennia-long communion of two great civilisations was a clear case of communication gap, the then ruling regimes' incapability as well as relational deficit, hinted by Nehru's letter to Myanmar's independence leader U Nu, and confirmed by the notes Wang Hongwei, a recognised author on the issue, has left. Nehru admitted in parliament in 1959 he saw no point in making the border issue public and saw considerable advantage in publicly denying that there was a dispute with China. The cost that such a denial brought was heavy. The change that China's image suffered among Indian students as a consequence of the conflict in 1959 was a drastic one—from a nation regarded till erstwhile as friendly, progressive, honest, nationalistic, brave, cultured and active (before February 1959) to one aggressive, cruel and war-lusting (December 1959).

Differing perceptions of reality can spawn conflict, damaging relations between states to generate crises and wars. This is what social psychology tells us. Allen S. Whiting, in his seminal volume *China Crosses the Yalu*, concludes that the Korean War resulted from the breakdown of communications, as a function of differing perceptions of reality (Kim, 1979).

A closer look at the problematique of what went wrong in the past and what is still going wrong, in short, a post-agnostic as well as a diagnostic probe, thus becomes essential to arrive at a genuine prognosis of the things to come, particularly when the relations between the four major states of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are going to decide not just the general course of global, regional and internal events but also the pattern of their relationships with countries such as Nepal. In that sense, the quadrangular relationship of these state actors, not just the bilateral relationship between US and China, regarded by Markus B. Liegal as the most important factor of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, emerges as a critical driver of states' relations in the decades ahead (Liegal, 2017).

The relational agenda is also related to the complex, delicate nature of the Belt and the Road (BR) agenda. The Belt and Road's ultimate justification rests on the policy benefits that could accrue from a comprehensive exercise on the theme of transition of state and parastate actors now underway, their changing relationships and the new values and goals emerging for the regimes in India and China in the context of a redefined mode of India-China relationship, and the ongoing Universal Transition of Paradigms (UToP).

Reframing the role of the quadrangle (China-India-Russia-USA) emerging vis-à-vis Nepal and resetting the terms of that relationship, thus, acquire a prominence that is hard to exaggerate. Unless one uses a framework based on relational restructuring and the capabilities of regimes to mend and mould the

multifold relationships in the light of the issues arising and the challenges rising from the perspective of the four states' advent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, two major dimensions would be lost and problems may multiply, in comprehending and correlating the impacts and implications of the Belt and Road. The plethora of historical and empirical evidence available have yet to be matched by an adequate examination in the light of the opportunity-capability nexus between China, India and Nepal as well as the outside world.

### **National Interest and National Security**

National interest can be broadly defined at three separate levels-internal, regional and global-although it is not always easy to distinguish where one begins and the other ends. Despite such constraint, it is now clear that globalisation, liberalisation, privatisation and the forces of marketisation are making states more and more interdependent upon each other, and with advances in IT and Cyberpower, borders are falling, and distance has lost much of its earlier meaning. Environmental pollution is becoming an issue of existential crisis and a global security liability. Democratisation and development are also becoming interconnected, and in many ways the parameters and perimeters that earlier kept national interests bounded and divided are now changing fast. Waves of global migration are breaching former walls between states. In such a context, the capability of modern regimes will lie in setting up as many regional and global networks as possible as also in maintaining and consolidating them.

As far as national security is concerned, defining and operationalising it in the right way can make the difference between success and failure. The outdated mode of defining it in personal, clan and family terms led to multiple failures in foreign policy because the ruling regimes of the old days clung to what could be termed 'Hegemonic Nationalism' (Limbu-Angbuang, 2011). They still do. But in the changing scenario of the new century, the vision, objectives and strategy need a fresh reformulation (see the Table on UTOP for elaboration on how the values and concepts are changing) and a novel approach to operationalising them if Nepal is to ably face the challenges of democratisation and development and successfully navigate its course in the days ahead. This, however, demands bracing up for replenishing its regime capability and refurbishing its outdated relational skills to open up the opportunities that lie ahead.

Apart from the issue of reformulating national interest and national security, the state of Nepal also wrestles with claustrophobia in addition to two other maladies-Historic Amnesia and Defense Nihilism.

If a powerful antidote to the constraint of its landlockedness is the unique strategic position of the country, symmetrically located at the centre of two great civilisations and world markets at its door, historic amnesia-the propensity of forgetting this nation's cultural and historic heritage-could be remedied by reviving and replenishing the ancient roots of two great faith-systems and civilisations that could start a flow of visitors on a stupendous scale here. Calls are often also made to diminish or devalue its martial tradition, citing the case of Costa Rica's abolition of its army. A more ridiculous analogy could scarcely be forwarded. It is like chasing a goose that does not exist. Israel and Switzerland offer far better models to follow. Can one forget the sagas of valour the heroes of Nepal's army have left on the sands of history? What has been done to capitalise on these icons and to enhance Nepal's platform at home and abroad?

### **Regime Capability**

The term Regime Capability has been introduced in this study to explain the faculty of governing bodies in power to perform certain specific political functions. The analysis of regime capability here differs from the five capabilities of political systems set forth by Almond and Powell in that it is more structured, to make the roles of regime more specific (Almond & Powell, 1996). Capability analysis can improve our capacity to comprehend the ability of a regime to address a challenge and opportunity vis-à-vis other regimes.

What constitutes regime capability?

1. Visioning: Political insight; goal setting and planning; policymaking; building strategy to embody the political ethics, values, principles and rules of a political order at issue; innovation (R&D)
2. Stakebuilding : Formation, cultivation and consolidation of political stakes of various kinds (with integrity, transparency, accountability) at different levels (survival as existential stake: management and promotion of security, power, democracy and development)
3. Governance : Authority and legitimacy in rule setting, implementation and adjudication; ability to command, control and enforce collaboration among the mass public at home
4. Securitising : Ensuring peace, stability and order as well as the rule of law and maintenance of the prevailing political regime
5. Mediation : Managing conflict, crises and political turmoils through negotiation, adjudication and reconciliation
6. Resource use : Ability to utilise physical, natural, cultural, social, financial and human capital in a judicious way
7. Mobilisation : Ability to activate, distribute and deploy as well as use or engage human and other resources during normal times and crisis

situations to achieve or counter specific political objectives as also to shape up issues and frame up and develop agendas

8. Relational skills : The faculty to cultivate and establish linkages with actors or agencies at home and abroad, using hard or soft diplomacy at different levels through communication, alliances, organisational networks, publication and otherwise
9. Power projection and enhancement : Cultivation, consolidation and use of political power-hard and soft-to sustain and enhance credibility and acceptability of the regime in the pursuit of the goals set
10. Integration : Identity, inclusion, ownership.

### **Capability Index**

If we agree on this list of regime capabilities a sovereign state is expected to hold, a tentative framework to measure the capability gap could be formulated, and a capability dividend could be used. A capability index would then indicate a state's ability to manage issues at stake, set up an agenda, like the Belt and Road, and evaluate the progress made over time and also compare the performance with other state and non-state actors and agencies. Each of these capabilities depends on and influences other capabilities. For instance, the visioning role is a generic capability that influences other capabilities. The ability to manage conflict presupposes a certain base of power; integration implies the ability to mobilise; development capability incorporates a number of other capabilities in the absence of which it would not function adequately; and so on. States in a developed phase execute these roles in an integrated manner, producing a synergic effect. This they do in implementing the rules properly, playing their roles and making other actors involved in the game play their roles effectively, using the resources in an efficient way, exercising the rights properly in a responsible manner, responding more or less adequately to the constituents whose agendas are at stake as well as considering the risks the agenda may bring. A mega infrastructure and connectivity project like the Belt and Road in such a context demands far more improvisation and experiment than a mid-level undertaking. But if the BRI is to be handled maturely, three more elements need to be kept in mind.

First is the process of *Stakebuilding*. Any ambitious agenda like the BRI necessarily calls for strategies to manage new stakes, which will have to be created and shaped up, many of which may not be yet clear, but appear on the scene as the agenda progresses. Building stakes, defining them, shaping them up and modifying imply a certain dynamism in the role of the key players in the game. Resilience and vigilance will then be at a premium.

Second is the role allowed to the principle of *Subsidiarism*: Are the players handling the roles efficiently and adequately proportionate to their capacity?

Obviously, the Belt and Road will bring together actors, investors and stakeholders in a multi-level exercise of projects ranging from infrastructure to interaction on multiple forms of investment where mere stakeholding will not do.

Third is the element of *Efficacy*. How adequately this variable is factored into BRI is likely to decide whether the agenda succeeds or fails.

Before proceeding further, Table 1 presents three types of governance regimes-survival, subsistential and self-sustaining-in terms of the ten forms of a regime's core capabilities and tries to explain how they differ. In most of these variables, the ruling regimes of Nepal fall in the first category, confronting the crises of governance on multiple fronts (of confidence, of trust, of competence, of cooperation and many others) and facing pressures of various kinds at the same time-pressure of globalisation, of democratisation, of human rights, of environmental challenge and of ethnic demands (Aditya, 1996).

*Table 1 Types of Governance Regime and Their Core Capabilities*

CORE DIMENSION	SURVIVAL REGIME	SUBSISTENTIAL REGIME	SELF-SUSTAINING REGIME
1. Visioning	Based on rulers	Limited to rulers and elite	Citizen-wide
2. Stakebuilding	Primitive	Begins to reach professionals	Mass-based
3. Governance	Autocracy	Oligarchy	Democracy
4. Securitising	Ruler-centric	Middle class	Public
5. Mediation	Primitive	Middle-level	Advanced
6. Resource use	Extractive	Starts to distribute	Efficient/Efficacious
7. Mobilisation	Physical/ Natural capital	Human capital- elementary stage	Optimal use of 3 kinds of capital
8. Relational	Realpolitik mode	Club diplomacy	Hard & soft diplomacy, public diplomacy
9. Power	Army-based	Hard power alliances	Soft power plus Three-Track linkages
10. Integration	Physical (Military)	Rulers & elite	Promotion of identity, inclusion and ownership

Source: Author.

### **Universal Transition of Paradigms (UTOP)**

At a time when even the world's food habits are under intense pressure for change (from carbon-intensive meat protein base towards a base with lower carbon footprints), thanks to the enormous impact of dietary choices pushing the Earth's thermometer deep into the red zone, as a UN report released recently by the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change)

announces, little wonder that a critical shift is underway in a number of areas. In virtually every crucial socio-political sector, be it security, human rights, power or state function, one can notice a fundamental change in the attitudes, outlook and approaches taken in defining and operationalising the issues and agendas. This is affecting deeply and broadly not just the mode of perception but also the definition and interpretation of a whole array of global processes—democratisation, liberalisation, migration, privatisation, marketisation and other forces—which look irreversible. Table 2 presents, in a suggestive vein, only some of these changes underway.

*Table 2 Universal Transition of Paradigms<sup>1</sup>*

<b>From</b>	<b>Towards</b>
State as a source of sovereignty	People
Nation-State	State-Nation
Nationalism	Humanism
Balance of Power	Balance of Interests
Hard Power	Smart Power (Hard + Soft Power)
Gravitation of Power	Diffusion
Clandestine Agreements	Transparency
Military Security	Human Security
Majoritarianism	Consociationalism, PR
Unitarianism	Pluralism
Elite Conventional Diplomacy	Public Diplomacy
Formal Representation	Substantive Representation
Upward Accountability	Downward Accountability
Stability in Governance	Public Welfare
Stakeholding	Stakebuilding
Economic Growth	Development
Ethnic (Exclusive) Identity	Multiple (Cosmopolitan) Identity
Hegemonic Nationalism	Civic Nationalism
Isolation	Connectivity
Extractive State	Distributive, Inclusive State
Violent Revolution	Civic Transformation
Command/Control mode of operation	Collaboration, Coordination
Centralisation of Power	Devolution of Power
Concentration of Role and Authority	Subsidiarism
Domination	Interdependence

Table: Author.

## **Relation Building**

The crucial significance of the role of building genuine relationship between states is underscored by the fact that among the four criteria of legal statehood established by the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States was the capacity to enter into relations with other states (Article

<sup>1</sup> UTOP: For elaboration on the theme, see Hauchler Kennedy, *World Order*, pp. 28-36, particularly Table 2 (Structures and Processes in the World of States and the World of Societies). Also refer to *Questioning Conventional Wisdom* in UNRISD, Box 1.1.

1) (Archer et al., 2014). Closely related to the agenda of state-to-state relationship, however, is the agency-state, inter-agency and agency-citizen relationship, dimensions that demand deeper probe than given so far. Such a transformation has to be directed from the rigid mechanical mode of the existing official approach towards a more dynamic, resilient and humane one. Finally, the key to such a transformation of relationships is dialogue nurtured and sustained by the civil society over time in the public space through their interactions and decisions over choices available to achieve their goals. One creative way to restructure relations would then be to adopt a multi-track approach to governance and diplomacy based on three critical elements of the society-state, elite and people at large. Table 3 suggests how it can transform and enhance relationships.

*Table 3 Multi-Track Approach to Relation Building*

	Track 1 State-Based	Track 2 Elite-Based	Track 3 People-Based
Key Role Player	Rulers	Elite	Masses
Action Mode	Command	Mobilisation	Participation
Mechanism	Authoritarian	Patronistic	Democratic
Transparency	Closed	Partly Open	Transparent
Decision-Making	Centralised	Delegated	Decentralised
Nature of Regime	Hegemony	Oligarchy	Decentralised
Social Capital	Very Low	Low	Medium to High

Table: Author.

The strategy of building and mending relations, in its essence, may be encapsulated in terms of 5 B's: Bridging (joining hands with a party with whom there is no relationship yet); Bonding (using a glue to link up); Binding (setting up relationship under certain principles); Bounding (fixing up the boundaries over what to do and what not to do); and Bending (conceding in a candid gesture). The last gesture is obviously the most difficult to apply, but not impossible. Chancellor Brandt's apology offered on the crime committed by the Nazis in the course of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising was a historic gesture to bend and apologise. The four states in the emerging power quad could mend and amend their relations at multiple levels if they heed the message Brandt gave.

One major factor in political instability in Nepal in particular, and the region as a whole in general, is the absence of the physical infrastructure so essential for economic growth, the lack of financial investment and an appropriate investment strategy to kick-start industrialisation and sustainable growth.

Networking with the Belt and Road agenda and the MCC can bring in resources, technology and the mode of involvement needed by the country. But integrity as well as commitment in handling the resources-human, physical and technological-would be crucial to the success of both the BRI and MCC in view of the traditional inefficiency and corruption that prevail.<sup>2</sup>

In that context, utilising Track 1 diplomacy more skillfully to pull in the unrestricted flow of economic, political and developmental interaction between the diverse partners of the BRI, MCC and other projects at the mega-or macro-level becomes essential. But since states often confine their strategies to Track 1 (see Table 3 on Multi-Track Approach to Relation Building) on all the seven sectors concerned, activating Track 2 and Track 3 would optimise the benefits far more effectively and efficiently than just adopting a single-track approach.

Drawing the correct lessons from one's own or another country's past and present experience in relation-building may not always be easy, as John Spanier explains. A focus on the threat perceived from another country-calculated in terms of the number of troops in uniform, the arms available and overall military capability-*threat analysis* in short, may blind one to what he calls *vulnerability analysis* to bring success in achieving some objectives, but may fail to achieve others. It is an approach that prevents the decision-makers from drawing the correct lessons from such an experience. To illustrate his point, Spanier cites the case of the German General Staff's decision to go for a preventive war in 1914 against the rise of the Russian might, overlooking the latter's vulnerability (defeat in 1904-1905 by Japan, peasant unrest harbingering the revolution there and its economic weakness), as also the American failure to win the war in Vietnam. In this context, he also adds that a better explanation of why a state may achieve success in one situation and face failure in another would be that it may have the right kind of power for one but not the other, explicable in terms of three variables-the *kind* of power used, the *purposes* for which the power is used and the *situations* in which power is used, arguing that only an analysis of the *specific context* in which the *relationship* (stress added) of the two countries concerned occurred can explain it better. This difference between power as a *possession* (implying power as a noun, a quantitative measurement of the components of a nation's power) and power as a *relationship* James Rosenau explains as a process of interaction.

One episode from China's medieval history illustrates how a ruling regime's wrong policy can end up damaging relations, inviting disaster for the regime. Both science and sailing skidded to a stop in mid-15<sup>th</sup> century China when

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<sup>2</sup> For elaboration on the issue, the reader is referred to this author's report on BRI, Regime Capability and Relational Deficit, and Resurgent Civilization States: Can Nepal Address China's Belt and Road Agenda? (due for Publication by the Centre for Social Inclusion and Federalization (CECIF), Kathmandu).

the bureaucrats banned shipbuilders from constructing seafaring vessels. Each edict, each ban, each embargo separated the government from the people, bringing the Great Wall higher and higher that ultimately eroded people's support for the emperors. The Ming dynasty entered a phase of two centuries of decay, and finding himself betrayed, the last Ming emperor in 1644 hanged himself from a tree as the Manchus forced their way through the Great Wall. The Ming bureaucrats had invited their own downfall by severing themselves from the people, claims Todd G. Buchholz (Buchholz, 2016).

### **Restructuring Relations**

The traditional view of strategy building that dominated centuries of political theory, policy formulation, conflict narratives, state negotiations and diplomatic transactions was essentially rooted in a zero-sum mode of relationship. Transcending the barriers of that conventional paradigm may appear difficult but is not impossible. Here is a set of arguments and propositions that explain why.

One: The first of them bears upon human and national psychology. In the course of formulating their foreign policy, countries often start with excessive hopes and expectations from the premises and potentials of their relationships. Moderating their foreign policy objectives and strategies on the basis of ground reality instead of overextending them or trying to reach too far can prevent the many ups and downs characterising their mutual relations.

Two: The second aspect is hermeneutical-fungibility of Foreign Policy goals, objectives, interests and the interpretations made.

Three: The third one is procedural, related to the definition of competition. Competition in the conventional sense carries a certain negative tone of conflict that is hard to avoid. But this is an over-simplified outlook. Probing deeper, it turns out to be more complex and multi-dimensional; in other words, highly fungible. Depending upon the use one makes of it and the objective one chooses, it can take multiple forms. And, here lies the challenge for the political innovator. Competition can become complementary (reciprocal) when in a game of competition between two partners, say A and B, the two compete, but they also concede roles and benefits to each other under a certain agreement. Competition, moreover, may become collaborative if the two partners by and large share the benefits and minimise the loss by, say, trading in an area A that fetches gains despite the minor losses accrued in another area B. Competition can also turn out to become a creative exercise if they explore their constituencies in the arena of values where they experiment, sharing the findings and lessons obtained. Finally, there is, of course, the confrontative mode of competition that has dominated the history of states' relations, thanks

largely to the hegemonic role large powers usually play to grab resources and deny them to others. But in our cyber era when over-commodification is likely to recede, the hard mode of competition is likely to undergo a sustained transformation in its intensity and magnitude in the unfolding mode of interaction between and among states.

Four: Relationship is obviously not something that can be commanded. At the most, it is subject to the mechanism of control. But the mechanism of control too is becoming quite fungible. With the pace of democratisation, the former unitary mode of control is now giving room for a more diversified form that implies separation of powers and roles as well as checks and balances. The increasing interdependence that is now replacing the dependence of states and influencing relationship is becoming far more diverse than it ever has been so far (Table 2).

Five: The next consideration is structural. Obstacles, for instance, to normalisation of relations are not fixed and permanent. They may change. For example: there was the Soviet invasion that hampered the relationship between the US and the Soviet Union, but once the Soviet troops were withdrawn, the relationship improved. Change in the stationing of troops along the Sino-Soviet border is another instance. The subtle, sudden shift that Sino-American relations underwent in the early seventies of the last century is another example.

Six: Threats perceived previously may diminish over a certain period as the Soviet threat perceived by China and the USA did.

Seven: As referred to earlier, a relationship at issue can undergo sustained change in the objectives, interests and intentions as well as the interpretation one lends to them as they become commonalised, convergent or even consensual. The one risk here is that if there is just one such bridge, its collapse, as Levine argues, can jeopardise the whole effort. Optimising and diversifying bonds can become a better safeguard for strong relationship by activating simultaneously or in sequence the five B's of relation-building, for instance.

### **Clandestine Covenants and Public Diplomacy**

The traditional objectives of relation-building apart, treaties have often served at least one more function that tends to remain clandestine: recognition by a third power and thereby enhancement of the prerogatives of a strong state over a weak one under the *Doctrine of Hegemonic Influence*. In more familiar usage, that doctrine dons the more respectable garb of *Sphere of Influence*. Under the Taft-Katsura Agreement in 1905, for instance, the US recognised Japan's prerogatives over Korea.

One typical example of clandestine covenants was the memorandum annexed to the Korea-Japan Agreement (1907), kept secret because it stipulated not only dissolution of the Korean military forces but also handing over of the Korean courts and police to Japanese management (Korean Overseas Information Service, 1990). Another was the secret protocol signed in the course of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact made in August 1939 between the Soviet Union and Germany. It stated that Finland belonged to the Soviet sphere of interest, allowing the Red Army to attack Finland three months later to unleash the Winter War that continued until March 1940, compelling the Finns to cede a large part of Karelia, a war that resumed itself till 1944, forcing the Finns to cede the Petsamo as well as paying great war reparations (Hakli, 1988). The pact between India and Sri Lanka made in the mid-eighties was intended to serve more or less a similar purpose. The dangers of such deals for strategic political games are being slowly, if belatedly, realised today.

History bears witness that the aftermath of such coercive transactions is not without trouble and may prove a prelude to future violence. That the three well-known cases of political vendetta-of Stevens' assassination in San Francisco (1907), of Ito Hirabumi at Harbin (1909) and of Rajiv Gandhi at Sriperumbudur (1991)-were each related to treaty events eloquently affirms the point made.

The notorious nature of such secret deals stems not only from the fact that they are bilateral, rendering it convenient for the stronger state to press its points on the weaker partner, unequal in nature and exacted under duress to consolidate the interest of a regional hegemon, but also from the fact that pressures may be put in all possible forms to disallow registration with the United Nations and publication in full form.

In fact, force in one or another form-be it political power, military threat or economic pressure in the form of a sanction-almost always tended to temper interstate relations until World War I. International relations in those days were conducted between governments alone, largely on the basis of the power they epitomised. Even after 1874 and onward, the year that is said to have heralded the end of *laissez-faire liberalism*, government remained the single central player in the arena of domestic and international politics, and force remained the paramount element-as often the end and quite frequently the means-in most of the state's transactions and their relations inside and outside. It was the nub of the whole problematique of relation-building.

This role of force, however, is now facing challenge as it has never done before; and that on more than one front. If the Bricker Amendment symbolises one form of growing resistance to the traditional domination of the executive in treaty-making, institutionalisation of the ratification principle at a global

level poses another. The controversy dogging the series of agreements on energy and other resources initiated by the Nepali government with India after 1989 suggests that even among the developing nations the principle of public mandate for treaty legitimacy is going to become a decisive factor in the implementation of treaties in the future than the sheer power of states or the initiative of governments. It is a mandate rooted implicitly in the people's inalienable right to know about arrangements stipulated by state executives that invariably concern their life and destiny of the nation.

### **Why Public Diplomacy?**

Public diplomacy is about informing, educating and enabling citizens on the key public issues and agendas of the day, domestic as well as foreign, so that they can comprehend the issue at stake to take rational decisions affecting them in the short and the long term.

Public diplomacy, however, demands a nuanced conversation in the civil space about the fast changing values of foreign and domestic policies in the light of the ongoing Universal Transition of the Paradigms of rights and responsibilities, rules and roles, security and defense, growth and development, hard and soft power as well as the purpose, policy and personnel involved in the process called diplomacy, which is concerned with the destiny of both the public at large at home and in the neighbourhood across the border. The failings of traditional diplomacy in this regard are becoming counterproductive, bringing negative externalities in unanticipated ways, engendering risks of unacceptable proportions that could be avoided and managed if a mechanism for proactive vigilance, monitoring and feedback is put in place in time.

The failure of public diplomacy can bring consequences that remain invisible before but can become devastating later. The Tarai-Madhes movement in the south of Nepal is one telling example in this regard. It can entrench nationalisation of apathy and indifference in the public mind, even habitual inertia as it has done in Nepal, among the media and civil society, neutralising possible positive remedies and rendering the mass partisan and deeply divided. The deep, broad and generational polarisation of the Tarai-Madhes Movement underway poses unprecedented risks for this nation's solidarity and is threatening to rive apart even the close neighbourhood relations between Nepal and India. The second order effects of policies, implemented in a traditional zero-sum way, can, moreover, bring impacts and implications of unimaginable proportions. Nothing better than Nigeria's federalisation proves what happens when a noble principle and idea is wrongly implemented. Neither foreign policy nor neighbourhood relationship is an exception to this rule: sans capacity building, it becomes a gabardine suit on a beggar's body; in less than a few months the gift turns into the beggar's rags.

For far too long, public diplomacy has been left ignored, or abandoned in sheer neglect, in the annals of the neighbourhood relations of South Asia, particularly India and Nepal. If one familiar consequence is the havoc brought every year by the dams on one side and floods on another, no less familiar is the array of cross-border conflicts plaguing the relations of these two neighbors. The third one is the regional fault line of tectonic proportions threatening to damage their reciprocal relations like never before. The inability of the ruling regime in Nepal to adequately inform the constituencies on both sides of the border brought a constitution which was a damp squib facing amendment even before the ink was dry on the final draft.

### **Regime Capability and Relational Stakes**

Table 4 attempts to present a comparative view of the regime capability of 24 countries, including Nepal. Whereas the figures in the cells on the left column are empirical data on proxy variables for the five components of capability, the entries at right in each column give the ranking orders. Except on the Military Environment Index, Bang per Dollar, and Tradition where Nepal supersedes almost all countries and on governance where it figures in the middle, its capability otherwise fares poorly, particularly in resource use where it is at the bottom.

**Table 4 Regime Capability of 24 Countries**

	1 Governance		2 Securitising			3 Resource use		4 Mobilisation			5 Relation		
			(a) Military Strength (000)	MEI	BPD (b)	Tradition	HDI	Population mn					
1 Afghanistan	-		174	4	14	7	.408	35.50	16	24	20	4.63	21
2 Australia	24	2	58	4	5	7	.944	44,649	6	6	1	24.50	19
3 Bangladesh	11	13	157	7	48	6	.608	3,524	22	6	17	164.70	7
4 Brazil	16	9	334	3	13	3	.759	14,103	16	7	13	209.30	5
5 China	14	10	2,035	5	28	6	.752	15,309	15	4	14	1,409.50	1
6 Finland	25	1	-	4	16	9	.920	40,586	7	1	6	5.50	24
7 France	20	6	189	5	10	4	.901	38,606	10	3	8	65.00	14
8 Germany	22	4	106	6	15	9	.936	45,229	5	1	2	82.00	11
9 India	16	9	1,395	3	54	7	.640	6,427	19	3	16	1,339.20	2
10 Indonesia	11	13	667	4	10	5	.694	11,189	18	5	15	264.00	4
11 Iran	14	10	523	4	12	6	.798	19,083	14	4	11	81.20	12
12 Israsel	19	7	177	9	36	7	.903	33,102	12	2	7	8.30	23
13 Japan	22	5	247	5	9	15	.909	39,002	8	3	6	127.50	9
14 Korea Rep.	18	8	-	3	26	8	.903	35,938	11	5	7	51.00	15



The curiosity that the exercise prompts here is: How did countries like Afghanistan, Bhutan and Indonesia use their regime capability (RC) to handle the various issues that arose in their transition from their more or less authoritarian past toward democratisation and development and with what consequences?

A cursory look at Table 4 enables us to compare the governance, securitising, resource use, mobilisation and relational capabilities of these three countries and shows none of them holds a high position in ranking compared to many others listed. Afghanistan ranks 14<sup>th</sup> in military strength and 11<sup>th</sup> in bang per dollar, although it does better in military environment and tradition, is 24<sup>th</sup> in resource use, 20<sup>th</sup> in HDI (as a proxy for mobilisation) and 21<sup>st</sup> in relational capability. Except in the military sector, Indonesia, too, figures poorly in most of the capability domains, compared to the country cases of Europe, Australia and USA where the regimes hold substantially superior positions in stark contrast. In one way or other, each of these regimes (including Nepal's) could be regarded as *authoritarian* regimes when they started their transition. This may go a long way to explain their failures and partial success in the projects of modernisation and democratisation that they later took up.

Table 5 offers a cursory view of the nature and level of interests as also an overview of the kinds of relational stakes of certain countries in Nepal. For obvious reasons, political, historic, economic, ecological, educational and demographic stakes dominate these relations, among which, those of China, India and the United State figure as crucially important. It is equally obvious that partnership in the Belt and Road agenda is likely to modulate the countries' relations at both the mutual and multilateral levels. This, in turn, suggests a restructuring of the prevailing mode of relations in two new ways vis-à-vis the traditional realist school of foreign policy formulation that Nepal must now resort to if it is to turn a new leaf. This it can do by redirecting the conventional structuralist (statist) approach through a focus first on a change in its domestic base of foreign policy and second by starting to concentrate on a change in its foreign policy norms and identity-building (the social constructivist approach to foreign policy-making). In adopting the first approach, domestic institutions become its key strategic resources to formulate the new order of foreign policy, which engages domestic actors (political parties, ethnic and interest groups, formal institutions such as courts and parliaments, politicians, businesses and corporations), in deciding and shaping out the nation's foreign policy. In that context, it would be difficult to overemphasise the role of focussing on identity, interests and shared ideas and values in place of the traditional factors adhered to by the realist school of foreign policy. This would raise new norms of behaviour and culture in Nepal's foreign policy.

**Table 5 Patterns of Countries' Relational Stakes and Interests in Nepal**

Country	Political	Historic	Economic	Religious	Social	Ecological	Educational	Demographic	Interest Levels	Threat Seen
1. Afghanistan	5	+					2			
2. Australia	3		3,4			(+)		1,2,3		
3. Bangladesh	2		1,2,5				1	3		
4. Bhutan		+		+			2			
5. Brazil			2			+				
6. Canada						(+)	1	1,3		
7. China	2,4	+	1,2,3,4,5	+	+	+	1,2	1,3	V. High strategic	Encirclement by USA
8. Finland										
9. France						+				
10. Germany										
11. India	2,3,4	+	1,2,3,4,5	+	+	+	1,2	1,2,3	V. High strategic	Encroachment
12. Indonesia			2			+		3		
13. Iran			+							
14. Israel							1,2			
15. Japan	3		2,4				1,2	3		



The queries that now come to mind are: How does Nepal's regime capability (RC) figure in handling its conflicts and crises; how successful has it been in shaping up its relational stakes (RS); and what is their scope in the future?

A quick look-back into the patterns of the states' relationship in South Asia suggests the following nine types (Table 6).

**Table 6 Patterns of State Relationship in South Asia**

Imperial	UK-India
Protectoral	India-Sikkim
Protégial	India-Bhutan
Special	India-Nepal
Equidistant	India-Nepal (1962-1989)
Cooperative	Nepal-Bangladesh
Comparative	India-China
Confrontationist	India-Pakistan
Hostile	India-Pakistan

Table : Author

The relational conflicts and crises that have dogged the history of bilateral relations between virtually each pair of states in the subcontinent suggest the old model of the realist school of relation-building does not work. The professional conventional club approach to foreign policy is an obvious failure not only because the slew of treaties and agreements based on the principle of hegemonic stability are generating not just occasional conflicts in the short-and mid-term, but also a whole set of crises, inviting sanctions and blockades that keep bedeviling the relations between most of the states in the subcontinent. Bilateralism is another factor that keeps the solution of problems at bay.

Even a casual look at Nepal's diplomatic linkage and its migration patterns abroad (Map) will show how diverse and widely extant Nepal's relationship with the outside world is. But does its relational capability match the relational stakes and interests it has at its disposal? To answer this query, let us look again at Table 4.

In governance, Nepal occupies a middle position (11<sup>th</sup> in rank), and in relational capability and resource use, it is at the near bottom (20<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>). Even in mobilisation, it fares only slightly better with its 18<sup>th</sup> position, but the picture changes dramatically when comparing its position on the Military Environment Index (MEI), as also other security subdomains. Here it tops the list in both bang per dollar and tradition. It will be relevant also to recollect here that in the 57 years between 1960 and 2017, Nepal's progress in the Human Development Index superseded the pace of each country in the South Asian

region except that of Afghanistan: a strong empirical evidence that Nepal is not really too far behind other countries in its developmental momentum. That offers hope.

### **Lessons Nepal Can Learn**

“A wise man learns from the mistakes of others”, says a Russian maxim, but a fool does not even from his own. As far as learning from the past is concerned, there is certainly no dearth of country cases Nepal can learn from. For just a few instances, there is Switzerland’s long story of democratisation, Finland’s epic struggle for independence, Japan’s modernisation, Israel’s survival through two millennia and Singapore’s swift evolution as an exemplary city-state.

What then can we learn from the Afghan imbroglio, Bhutan’s bid for isolation, Indonesia’s muddling modernisation and Nepal’s erratic past of regime changes?

Taking Nepal’s case first, it is important to note that regimes can change in three different ways. The first of them is the kind of transfer of power when a whole system of government alters its mode of operation for another kind of governance. This may be termed *System Change*. This happens in old political orders-such as monarchies, autocracies or dictatorships when power lies in the hands of a few persons or agencies. The second form of change occurs in the shift between ideology-based regimes, occurring more frequently in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and later when most of the governing systems changed their hands between fascist, Nazi, communist and democratic orders. The third kind consists in the internal shifts of power from one set of ruling executives to another. Obviously, the higher the turnover of governance regimes, the larger the political instability and uncertainty that follow. Seen in such a context, the governance regimes in most of the cases that could be considered after the fall of the Rana rule in Nepal in 1950 featured a very high level of political instability, policy discontinuity, misrule and corruption. This certainly was not unique to Nepal but is applicable to most of the developing countries. The benefits-political, economic, social and relational-as a consequence, did not accrue as expected since the average length of tenure of each regime that followed was too short to implement the rules, apply policies and consolidate the regime. Even the will to achieve was missing, and the democratisation project became a fragile process. Too often, the mass public was found becoming nostalgic about the preceding government system that had fallen (Rana rule over democracy and Panchayat/Monarchy over federal governance). The governance deficit in turn explains the *Democracy Deficit* that followed when institutionalisation by and large remained ignored. This is not to say that democratic change in 1950, 1990 or even in 2008 was totally sterile. But the tangible benefits that the systemic shift brought to the average

citizen was almost negligible compared to the people's aspirations that each movement<sup>3</sup> had spiralled up. The confusion and crises that marked the mode of governance as a consequence left their impact also on the relations that Nepal was beginning to build after its century-long isolation from the world outside.

This also forms the base for striking out new roots in relation-building and for navigating Nepal's course in the world order of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As for Afghanistan's abrupt switch in the seventies toward its Soviet neighbour in the north and then West-ward swing in its foreign relations, that about-turn reflects not only its fragile relational capability (rank 21 among the 24 states under analysis) but also affirms that pendular shifts in relation-building can bring disaster. Afghanistan is a singular case in that regard.

If the Afghan experience of the past five decades teaches anything, it is that neither traditional authority nor an external force nor even a whole political party by itself is adequate for social transformation. Afghanistan tried all such measures, and each of them ended in failure. The Afghan case also exposes the fallacy of the theory of spontaneous integration of ethnic groups in traditional society. That process is far from simple or autogenous. Like the development of a nation, it demands intricate, delicate social engineering. The Soviet setback is thus a classic demonstration of not only *where not to intervene* but also a lesson on *how not to attempt change* in a traditional society.

No less important is another lesson that the intervention brought in its aftermath: the *inertia of mass civil violence*—the difficulty of stopping civil violence once it is touched off. It was in such a mood of premonition that years ago, in the middle of the withdrawal debate, when the world's eyes were riveted on Kabul, a quick scenario analysis prompted this observer to envisage an ominous Thermidorean future following the Soviet withdrawal: "Afghanistan will enter yet another era of violent upheaval, prolonged instability, or civic turmoil". The prognosis he made in the late eighties of the last century for Afghanistan, unfortunately, has come to pass (Aditya and Dahal, 1986).

There is also much for anyone to learn about what happened in Bhutan in the past, what did not, how and why. The logic of isolation is often advanced and added to the tool of traditionalism to hone up its edge. But it is difficult to propose a more deadly potion for a nation's development. A nation cannot advance in isolation. It can only grow into a wasteland. If anti-modernism is the voice of the impotent, combining it with an isolationist policy can only bring prolonged stagnancy as it did not only for Japan and Nepal, but also for China. Centuries of isolation, persisting at a time when virtually the whole of the region was opening to the outside world, left Bhutan at the bottom in the region in most of the development parameters.

3 See Aditya, 2016, Chart 7 for a review of the political movements in Nepal.

The *Shangri-La* myth of Bhutan was rooted in its policy of two-fold isolation-internal and external-to which it clings to this day, with a passion that often verges on claustrophilia. The official reason given is familiar: preservation of its ancient tradition. But pursuing traditionalism for tradition's sake can prove a self-defeating game. Like the nail on the human finger, it protects, but if not shed now and then, becomes ugly, inconvenient to bear, a nuisance, and in time, a source of hurt and infection. Like the ancient Chinese girl's shoes or the Burmese belle's bamboo neck-frame, blind faith in tradition not only binds the human body, it can also fetter the human mind, blinding one to the social realities of the day. Societies can then long remain mired in the mud of stagnant traditions before they become aware of the costs of stagnancy. By the time they awaken, the damage will have been done. If tradition implies only the humility of bowed heads and the safety of silent tongues, such a tradition can, moreover, generate crippled, castrated communities in place of the proud robust nationhood that Bhutan expects to grow into. Tradition can turn even into a trap when the ruling elite starts to invent it into a myth. Political literature informs us that such mythopoesis becomes the order of the day, particularly when the regime is weak. The risk deepens further if somehow somewhere an external source for control becomes active behind the scene and an unholy understanding evolves between the vested interests at home and the power abroad, fuelling inter-ethnic misunderstanding-as happened between the Ngalong and the Lhotshampa in Bhutan.

As for Indonesia, when it emerged in the forties from decades of Dutch colonial rule, it was lacking in three forms of regime capabilities-governance (13<sup>th</sup> rank), resource use (18<sup>th</sup> rank) as well as in mobilisation (15<sup>th</sup> rank), and was hardly better in relation-building (15<sup>th</sup> rank). The last one particularly explains its pendular shifts in the policies and political strategies adopted by the ruling regime of the day. The policies and strategies adopted by Sukarno brought heavy costs not only for the ruling regime but also for the long-term destiny of Indonesia as a state, as a country and as a nation. Institutionalising peace called for radical changes in the conventional statist approach that refused to renounce *machtspolitik*. In the Indonesian context, most of the successors of Sukarno-Suharto, Wahid, even Megawati-somehow failed to realise that the military apparatus alone could not preserve stability of the Indonesian state (Green and Luchmann, 2004). If the art of state-building is to become a key component of national power, the traditional military power associated with nation-states needed something else to meet that challenge (Fukuyama, 2004).

Another major problem of the post-colonial rule in Indonesia was that the modernisation that followed brought not just a sense of unification and nationalist feelings, it also sowed seeds of separation and autonomy. Nationalism, in fact, is a two-way process. If it infects the enlightened few

at the top, it also starts seeping downward to the people at the bottom, who sooner or later will demand their share of rights, rules, resources and rulership. That process may be slow, but once it starts, it will not stop.

One more problem with the statist approach in the 1950s among the just liberated countries was their hard power-based strategies. Then there were others, too. No plan of practical action followed the principles announced or pledges given. No details on development came after the declaration of independence. No ideas and feelings substantiated the shell; the contents were missing inside. Once the euphoria of independence had passed, what remained was division and distrust. The planning for a second transition through a radical restructuring of the state and society never appeared to make the state regime more inclusive and governance more legitimate.

Still another problem of the Cold War era in Indonesia was its growth fetish. The real issue at stake then was not mere multiplication of wealth or attainment by the state of roles, powers and resources, but their proper, equitable distribution (Hobsbawm, 1994). Local autonomy and the rise of provincial power, which has meant growth lifting all regions in Indonesia, not just the elite in the capital city at the centre of the archipelago, decline of crony capitalism, and opening of a whole new growth of urban nodes during the post-Suharto years confirm the point just made (Sharma, 2012). If that trend is allowed to continue, Indonesia can reasonably be expected to assert a larger role in the days to come than the one it has played so far in the region's world politics after its independence, as it did in the nineties and may graduate to a status proportionate to its true political potentials.

In Indonesia's context, the method of playing with issues and ideas, keeping them alive but never elaborating was in keeping with Sukarno's style. Imagining Indonesia may have been easy and founding it was possible after decades of struggle, but forging it into a solid nation-state was a long-drawn effort, as he must have found in the days following Bandung, particularly since the world's fourth most populous country had also the world's most fractured population. Even the unity imposed by the government in Indonesia on the four Islamic parties in 1973 is said to have transformed inter-party conflicts into intra-party controversies.

For Nepal, Indonesia thus offers quite a few cases for comparison and lesson. Despite the stark contrast in their size, population and GNIC, the two countries bear uncanny similarities-in political instability, succession of cabinet coalitions, abolition of the party system, centralised Unitarian rule of 30 years, functional organisations (Golkar vs class organisations), rulers' versions of democracy (Panchayat's Guided Democracy and Indonesia's New Order), the government's inability to impose unity as also the failure of the Constitution

Assembly. Particularly striking in this regard is the coincidence of more than one episode.

Diversity in both countries remained a major problem, not only breeding distrust, disunity and division, but also diverting the people from the two key agendas of the day—democracy and development—less because it was a problem *per se* and more because it was not handled astutely. The real problem was not diversity, but managing it.

From Bandung to Belgrade and beyond, narratives abound today in the stories of struggles for rights for self-determination of nations, nationalities and minorities, struggling against assimilation, cultural integration, transfer, expulsion, or in certain cases, even annihilation. In a world that has graduated from the era of the quill to that of computers, superseding the might of cannons, this march of the nations can hardly be curbed. In such a situation, would retrieving political leadership alone be enough, as Gopal Krishna Gandhi assures? (Gandhi, 2013)

If the fall of empires at the end of the First World War failed to expose the Salt Water fallacy (imperial conquest of rivers and mountains is less objectionable than conquest directed at control over the seas), the liquidation of colonies after the Second World War failed to expose the spuriousness of the ideas of both Territorial (State) Sovereignty and State-Nation Identity. The confusion over the use of the terms 'state', 'nation' and 'country' still lingers, a confusion that surfaces clearly in both the Cartagena (1945) and Durban (1998) documents, which use these terms interchangeably. In fact, what Hobsbawm regards as 'Consistently Constitutional States' are just nine in number (Hobsbawm, 1994), and since ethnic and states' territorial boundaries rarely coincide, and since besides ethnicity, other factors also can militate for secession of nations—erosion of political ownership (independence of the USA from Great Britain in 1776), and ideological division (Vietnam, Germany and Korea after World War II)—the premonitions of Eric Hobsbawm about the impending political instability of states in the Third Millennium do not look very implausible (Hobsbawm, 1994).

The problem is thus multifold. Whenever an institution, be it the state, or even nation-state, is allowed to exercise its powers unfettered and unaccountably, fascism does not remain far (Roy, 2010). If nationalism in its fundamentalist form bred most of the genocides of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, statism, another variant of fundamentalism, is shaping most of the civil conflicts of this century. But if the two somehow combine together, the consequences can be imagined. When the ex-colonial state mutates into a new avatar aligning itself with political parties for power to execute its fiat through government for good or bad, the outcome is *state terrorism*. And there is no terrorism like state terrorism (Roy,

2010). Every strategy for democracy and development can then be cleverly and consistently scuttled. What the states need now is, therefore, a new paradigm of politics, and that means political relations based on robust, sturdy regime capability. This paradigm is concerned with the way political ideas and approaches, experiences and experiments, and the substance and the spirit behind the shell of politics are now beginning to be understood and explained, redefined and redeveloped at various levels of public discourse and practice—local, state and global. This also implies a healthy, positive, creative interaction between both actors and actants incorporating the process of supervenience, the emergence of a set of properties over another. Among others, this approach focusses on a new set of power transition about the roles, rules, resources, relations, rights and responsibilities involved, away from the conventional state-to-state framework of interaction. The non-state, parastatal and transnational actors and agencies are involved more actively and consciously in the new mode as subjects than as mere objects, clients or beneficiaries of the state.

If colonisation was a “search for gain”, as Sukarno contended in 1926, or the *Lebensraum* Adolf Hitler so dangerously tried to pursue, the predominant obsession of the post-war states has been power through political parties, which pushes them toward a form of what Ryser regards as *State-Colonialism*. But in a world where there are as many as six thousand nations totalling a population of one billion and covering 80 per cent of the world’s diversity, the power-hungry 200 or so states (among them, Myanmar, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Iraq and Yemen) will find it hard to manage the problem with the outdated real-political strategy, let alone resolve it. It is worth remembering that among the 40 others which were in danger of failing, four were Bandung states—Egypt, Iran, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. And, as if that were not enough, 145 of the 250 wars between 1945 and 2010, that is 58 per cent, were ‘Fourth World’ wars, which, Ryser says, took place between nations and between states and nations (Ryser, 2012) over self-determination, territorial control or use of natural resources. The Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung declared its full support to the Principle of Self-Determination of Peoples and Nations as set forth in the UN Charter, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples (2007) was not behind, nor was the International Covenant on the Rights of Indigenous Nations (1994). Behind was the states’ resolve to materialise the pledge they gave a long way back to their people, as Indonesia did, in its motto *Bhinekka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity).

### **Political Parties and Capability Stakes**

Table 7 now offers a quick preview of how situations differ in three kinds of political order—Monocracy, Oligarchy and Republic on 13 variables such as Regime Capability (Variable 11) and Relational Status (Variable 13).

**Table 7 A Three-Stage Scenario Analysis**

Variable	Monocracy Monarchy/ Autocracy	Status Quo Party-State Rule/ Oligarchy	Optimal Governance Federal Republic
1. Track Used	1	1, 2	1, 2, 3
2. Issue Awareness	Dormant - Rulers	Weak - Elite	Strong - Mass Public
3. Agenda Building	Rulers	Leaders	Public-Govt.- Private sectors
4. Mode of Political Mobilisation	State	Professional Elite	Mass
5. Political Stability	Very Low	Low	High
6. Nature of Policy & Strategy	Uncertain	Intermittent	Continuous, Cumulative
7. Resource Use Mode	Extractive	Top-Heavy Distribution	Judicious Distribution
8. Election Mode	None; Selective	Delegatory	Direct + Delegatory
9. Nature of Governance Regime	Appointed/ Nominated	Delegator Representation	Substantive Representation
10. Diplomacy	Informal	Club, Traditional	Public
11. Regime Capability	Very Low (Survival)	Low (Subsistential)	High (Self- Sustained)
12. Relational Status	Isolated or Narrow (Track One)	Broader (Double Track)	Wider and Deeper, Multi-Track
13. Conflict & Pol. Violence	Very High	Medium	Low

Table: Author.

The table clearly shows not only what differentiates an optimal mode of governance and relations from other forms, but also what kind of governance Nepal's republican order demands. In each of the 13 dimensions enumerated, the federal polity differs, often distinctly, and striving for a genuine republic also demands political stability as the basic desideratum or a *sine qua non*. Political stability, thus come only if the political parties, the key players in forming and felling governments, make it their key priority. But how do the political parties stand in their overall image at large?

Surveys done from time to time in Nepal on that issue consistently bring up a picture that is hardly pleasing, whether it is the Global Corruption Barometer,

the NOSC and Search Survey (1994), IIDS Survey (1996), the Himal ORG Marg Survey of 2001, the NCCS Survey of 2002 or the SDSA Survey of 2008. Most of the party people, particularly the leaders and party executives, may not like to face this kind of reality check. Yet the reality is there, which will not vanish with an ostrich-like approach. Also, of all the institutions surveyed, trust in the political parties ranks at the bottom, and a features analysis done by the author closely corresponds to such a conclusion.

Ultimately, politics, like life, is not only about the values we seek. It is about the values we stand for. With the right kind of vision, will and strategy, politics can become an art of not just the possible desirable or possible, but also practicable. Unfortunately, party politics in Nepal today has made even the possible impossible, and its overall course has turned our potential for near-self-sufficiency into a shameless story of self-deficiency and self-diffidence. If, therefore, war is too serious an issue to be left to the army and the generals, politics, too, is proving too critical an agenda to be left solely to the politicians and their parties. In such a context, the key objective of this presentation was focussing on the role of governing regimes and managing Nepal's relations near and abroad. What happens in the days ahead in this most important battle of all-the battle against political instability from within and without-will be fascinating to watch, but how exactly that is to be done should be left to the citizens, parties and their leaders. What is clear is that there is no such thing as an instant regime capability, nor a cut-and-paste process to achieve it. There will be neither a readymade republic nor the right kind of governing regime we all need. Each calls for debate, dialogue, discourse and decisive action. Each requires interaction, idea inputs as well as investment. Each, moreover, demands conviction, competence and collaboration, as also civic compassion. There are, thus, no choices to be made here, only unavoidable imperatives.

Nepal's experiences in handling crises or even in managing conflict resolution, one key factor behind the chronic political instability here, have not been very encouraging so far. Even the democracy project, like the agenda of development, has suffered quite a few pitfalls. All this is hardly the reason to abandon the regime and relation-building agenda. A closer look at the nation's score sheet reveals quite a few rays of hope: a subtle and steady, if slow, political transformation of the Nepali state from a traditional parochial power order based on birth and blood toward a more rational one; from a subservient judiciary toward a more independent institution; from a culture of silence toward a vibrant civil society with an unprecedented upsurge of the media and NGOs; and also a perceptible decline in the level of poverty. In the decade and half after the Rhododendron Movement for Republican Nepal, considerable progress has been made also in mainstreaming the Maoists and elsewhere through peace pacts, co-governance and elections for the Constituent Assembly. The dark clouds hovering over the nation are, thus, not without their silver linings, and the situation is not of total hopelessness, as is often portrayed.

Political parties must now come forward with a new frame of mind that yearns to aspire, imagine and dream together with the people at large so that their common interests can be translated into demands tomorrow to materialise into a concrete reality. Development, after all is first a hope, a belief, a vision and a dream asking to be turned into reality. In that regard, bonding of the three policy E's-Policy Effectiveness, Policy Efficiency and Policy Efficacy-through policy legislation, implementation, enforcement and follow-up assumes a crucial role. The impact of dysergy of opportunity costs when these three policy E's are absent or lacking can only be imagined at present. And the consequences of their synergy for the country as a whole, too, can only be imagined now. But they need to be imagined because it is an imagination worth pursuing.

### **Measures to Gear Up Regime Capability**

- Build-up issue and agenda awareness at the mass level.
- Strengthen R&D on the issues at stake.
- Promote public debate and discussion on the agendas of democracy and development.

### **Measures to enhance relational dividend**

- Upgrade public diplomacy.
- Adopt a North-South diplomacy.
- Use the Three-Track approach including soft power.
- Use the various skills of relational management. This means reformulating the roles of the various actors and agencies at work on the agenda in the neighbourhood and abroad as also reconfiguring relations in a vertical, horizontal as well as cross-generational way.
- Engage proactively a broad range of actors, agencies and institutions in building stakes. Stakebuilding is to stakeholding what property building is to property-holding. No stakes, no stakeholders. Stakes do not come from nowhere. Relationship, for instance, is a crucial stake in diplomacy, which must be built, promoted and reinforced before it can be held. All stakebuilders in this sense become stakeholders, but the converse need not be true.

### **Conclusion**

As far as Nepal is concerned, there is an acute need to break out of the trap of the conventional mode of relationship based on the realist school of thought and restructure it on the basis of the domestic and constructivist approaches suggested earlier. The discussion can now be rounded up with three key observations.

One: Grading the Regime Capability of the Nepali state on a 5-point scale

(1 very low-5 very high) does not fetch it scores above the bottom level. Upgrading calls for specific measures on most of the 10 dimensions mentioned earlier. Two: The country's very low score on Regime Capability explains its heavy Relational Deficit on various fronts-political, diplomatic, economic and cultural. Three: This offers hope and the reason for bracing up to make the move forward. But the move can be made successfully only if the stakeholders become stakebuilders together.

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# DIPLOMACY IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF BOUNDARIES

■ **Buddhi Narayan Shrestha**

## **Abstract**

*Diplomacy is an instrument for negotiation to find mutually acceptable solutions to a common challenge in a non-confrontational and polite manner. In this perspective, border diplomacy refers to the diplomatic approaches to demarcate, manage and resolve the border disputes in a peaceful manner. For Nepal, border diplomacy for demarcation and management should be based on the dynamic equilibrium of both the neighbours, China and India. This paper revisits the crux of diplomacy and border diplomacy for the peaceful settlement of disputes in a peaceful way. The research emphasises border demarcation diplomacy, focussing on Nepal-India and Nepal-China borders. The study explains about the border dispute between Nepal and India in the region of Lipulek, Limpiyadhura and Kalapani. Further, the paper suggests border management diplomacy for Nepal-China and Nepal-India, focussing on the Kalapani issue, and alerts about the possible circumstances during negotiations and recommends Nepal's potential strategies for border management in the future.*

**Keywords:** *Nepal-India Borderlands, Border Management Diplomacy, Border Demarcation Diplomacy, Broader Strategy*

## **Background**

The word “diplomacy” comes from the Latin word “diploma”, which refers to an official document, which in turn is derived from the Greek word δίπλωμα (diploma), which meant document folded over (Constantinou, 1996, p. 77). But in modern international relations, diplomacy is the process of conducting negotiations between representatives of groups or states. Comprehensively, diplomacy as a tool of foreign policy refers to the conduct of international relations through professional diplomats and experts concerning the issues of peacekeeping, trade, war, economics and culture, and ushering international treaties, agreements, alliances and other manifestations of foreign policy (Melissen, 2005).

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Colloquially, diplomacy is the employment of tactics to gain strategic advantage or to find mutually acceptable resolutions to a mutual challenge. It is a set of tools non-confrontational and non-coercive tool of foreign policy, as well as the process and machinery of negotiation. It is an important instrument of formulating and executing foreign policy. It is the demeanour or management of international relations by the application of intelligence and tactfulness to conduct the official relations amongst governments and independent states. It is mostly concerned with foreign policy and with the process of making and implementing policies (Kertesz & Fitzsimons, 1959, p. 266).

Geographical proximity definitely increases interactions among countries. could invite risk situations. In basic conceptualisation, borders are an opportunity for interaction driven by proximity, Border regulates the level of relationship amongst border-sharing states (Ullah & Kumpoh, 2018).

All the shared borders are characterised by different kinds and forms of separators. After the nation-states came into being, these separators began to yield a range of relationships, and thus became shared elements (Ullah & Kumpoh, 2018). The states sharing borders are even more dependent on each other. But, the dependency through borders becomes overshadowed by the advent of security issues in the global discourse.

Borders, in the international arena, are a contested area where debates have received renewed attention. Traditional diplomacy and foreign policy were engaged in the aspects of war and peace, and now, the border agenda has undergone enormous expansion in the last few decades, and border controls and security perceptions have changed significantly (Ullah & Kumpoh, 2018, p. 3). Also, boundary demarcation is a complex phenomenon as it is based on both domestic and international legislation. The boundary agreement between states may be an international legal document, but its making and ratification of the boundary are an exclusively internal political process. Likewise, during the delimitation phase, negotiations take place before the signing of an agreement. Those negotiations may be complex and tense, which may lead to serious disagreements among the parties (Nordquist, 2010).

Borders define a state's territoriality and provide a way for state sovereignty, but the relational nature of borders infringes upon the same sovereignty as well. Thus, a borderline can be a probable mirror of inner disputes as well as the origin of an interstate clash in itself. As boundaries are a relational, complex and potential source of conflict, preventive diplomatic measures through negotiations can de-escalate boundary conflicts in the world. This preventive diplomacy for de-escalation takes place under the framework of

international law. In the contemporary world, the use of force against any state in a conflict is not considered appropriate. So, the settlement of disputes pacifically is the underlying principle to build confidence in the international community to international laws' commitment towards world peace (Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2004). International law exercises its elemental effect through the application of international arbitration or tribunals, which generates the merit of depoliticising a dispute by referring it to technical experts. In this regard, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has been an advantageous and effective arbitrary mechanism for disputes in present times (Chetail, 2003).

The most fundamental way of peacefully settling territorial disputes is under international law. International law regulates the relations between states, and any disputes between states should be resolved through pacific means and in accordance with the principles of international law. The preservation of international peace and security is the major purpose of international law and the basic objective behind the creation of the League of Nations in 1919 and the United Nations in 1945 (Hamza & Todorovic, 2017).

In line with this, Article 33 of the UN Charter states that “the parties to any dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, shall, first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice.” (The United Nations, 2017). The principle of pacific settlement of disputes provides various ways of settling disputes among states, for which international law is the substantive criteria for solving a dispute.

On the contrary, in the case of actions concerning threats to peace, breaches of peace and acts of aggression, which are to be determined by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), it may call upon the members to apply measures such as complete or partial interruption of economic relations as well as rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations. If these actions seemed to be inadequate, the UNSC shall take actions which include demonstrations, blockades and other operations by air, sea or land forces of the members of the United Nations (The United Nations, 2017). However, of the many measures taken for the settlement of disputes, the main aim is to maintain international peace and security.

Therefore, for inter-state boundary disputes, the UN Charter and other regional and international documents stipulate, directly or indirectly, the settlement of disputes through peaceful means. Nevertheless, situations do arise where boundary-related issues could escalate into a serious crisis before they can be settled through pacific means. These irreconcilable circumstances also involve military exchanges between the disputing sides. Thus, boundaries, whether regulated or not, and boundary relations have always been and will remain a potential source of conflict in the world.

Diplomacy from the perspective of boundaries is the art and practice of conducting international boundary negotiations and agreements between states (Martinez, 2018). It calls for the intercession of professional diplomats and experts versed in the subject of peace-making to reach a common understanding. Moreover, border diplomacy is the use of tact to gain strategic advantage or to find commonly satisfactory answers to a common problem on the foundation of historically authentic documents and materials, which could be convenient for both sides in a congenial environment. Similarly, border diplomacy is an enterprise which demands a tireless supply of talented individuals with facts, figures and past incidents to convey and convince neighbouring boundary and surveying experts, in one of the alternative ways (Read, 1990).

Therefore, the diplomatic practice or steps by the states to resolve border disputes in a peaceful manner through demarcation and management is called border diplomacy. It not only deals with territorial dispute settlement but, in a broader sense, also deals with immigration, refugees and other related matters. Thus, border diplomacy highlights the management of border disputes that are deeply affected by the contradictory interests of various layers of government and 'twilight' entities that project statecraft at the periphery (Henrikson, 2000). It deals with the settlement of territorial disputes and maritime delimitation issues and revolves around their characteristics. Consequently, for international peace and security, border diplomacy deals with the settlement of border disputes, encouraging the practitioners of foreign policy and diplomacy to exercise international law effectively and strategically, and concurrently guide political leaders and the public to deepen their understanding of the practicality and limitations of international law.

In the world today, there are several border disputes that are a threat to international peace and security as well as other security threats such as proliferation of nuclear weapons. Sometimes, leaders cross the borders or meet at the disputed areas to negotiate and resolve the disputes or for other negotiations. In 1999, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Bajpayee and a high-

profile delegation went to Pakistan across the Wagha border and were received by Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (International Crisis Group, 2012).

### **Two-minute Diplomacy on the Border**

On June 30, 2019, U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un met at the highly fortified DMZ between North and South Korea and agreed to restart negotiations on the long-elusive nuclear agreement (US Embassy and Consulate in the Republic of Korea, 2019). DMZ is considered one of the world's most dangerous areas but the Joint Security Area (JSA) itself is a meeting point between the two states for negotiations.

President Donald Trump used his Twitter account to send an invitation to the North Korean leader to meet him at the DMZ, to which the latter responded positively. These two minutes of diplomacy on one of the most significant borders in the world carried risks and rewards for both men. It brought President Trump's goal of denuclearisation and elevated the North Korean leader's stature in his country, aiding to legitimise his rule (Sigal, 2020).

This was symbolic diplomacy and more than just a handshake, which later turned into a bilateral meeting at the Freedom House, where the leaders agreed to send their negotiators back to the table to seek a long-elusive agreement on North Korea's denuclearisation. Though this meeting of the two leaders at the border and private talks in South Korea have not had real outcomes for denuclearisation, the rivalry between the two states in the future could turn into successful mutual relations due to the border diplomacy facilitated by South Korean President Moon Jae-In (Kim & Snyder, 2019).

### **Border Dispute Mediation Diplomacy**

Threats to international security are instigated not only by inter-state relations but also by instability and conflicts within states that threaten to spill over into the international arena. In international relations and diplomacy, many techniques and methods have been used to successfully manage and resolve conflicts, such as negotiations, mediation, conciliation, judicial settlements, enquiry arbitration and other peaceful means. Thus, mediation is one of the measures of settling disputes in which a third party is utilised to reduce the differences or to seek a solution (Sargsyan, 2003).

Indian and Chinese soldiers have been engaged in an aggressive standoff in the Laddakh region since May 5, 2020, to which, U.S. President Donald Trump has sought to mediate in the border dispute. President Trump on May 27 offered to "mediate or arbitrate" in the border dispute, citing it is "a big conflict between India and China". As part of the border dispute mediation

diplomacy, President Trump mentioned that the USA was “ready, willing and able” to ease the tensions amid the continuing standoff between the armies of the two Asian giants (Kazmin, 2020). China, however, rejected the mediation offer, saying it did not want ‘intervention’ from a third party to resolve the military standoff. India, too, diplomatically turned down the offer, stating that India was engaged with China to peacefully resolve the border dispute (Laskar & Patranobis, 2020).

Previously also, President Trump had offered to mediate to ease tensions between India and Pakistan on the Kashmir issue. The border dispute mediation diplomacy was proposed to Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan on July 22, 2019 by President Trump, citing that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had sought his mediation, which was eventually denied by India. Also at the 45th G-7 Summit in France, President Trump had extended the mediation proposal, but Indian Prime Minister Modi politely but firmly rejected it (Roche, 2020). These incidents demonstrate America and President Trump’s willingness to see border diplomacy materialise through mediation, although it has not been successful.

In this way, mediation has been a process of peaceful settlement of disputes. The process of mediation in border diplomacy is especially an important aspect in securing international peace and security. Thus, border dispute mediation diplomacy is a major instrument in demarcating, regulating and monitoring the boundaries so that the conflict doesn’t escalate further between the states.

### **Border Demarcation Diplomacy**

Border diplomacy constitutes aspects of international relations, and takes help of international law, and diplomacy to deal with the issues of border management migration, refugees, immigration, maritime borders, mobility of people through the borders, peaceful settlement of disputes and others. Boundary as a political entity governs people’s lives within it and significantly affects the lives of the people living near it. Borders, or the demarcation lines between states, are also associated with natural formations and come in the form of rivers, mountain ranges, peaks, narrow passes, lakes and others (Anne-Laure & Szary, 2015).

In contrast to the concrete natural or man-made boundaries that separate the peoples between two states, some areas on the globe are characterised by homogenous topography along with identical human behaviour, food habits, similar attire and languages on both the frontiers (Bruns, 2017). For example, the porous border between Nepal and India can be taken as an example. There is no conspicuous demarcation of the border between India and the southern part of Nepal with a homogenous and similar culture, religion, language and traditions.

Boundary demarcation of the states comprises actual lying down of the boundary pillars or other similar physical structures based on the framework of the terms of reference in the negotiations. It includes allocation, treaty or agreement on delimitation of the boundary line, and the ongoing frontier administration for boundary maintenance. It also refers to the alignment of stones, concrete pillars of various kinds and also the cleared roads are to be inscribed (McMahon, 1935).

A political framework of boundary allocation, demarcation, delimitation and documentations are practised, whereas a professional framework of boundary maintenance and boundary administration is used (Srebro & Shoshany, 2013). As boundary demarcation is an aspect of diplomatic negotiations, diplomatic norms are taken into consideration between the neighbouring states. The norms are as follows:

1. The border between two states shall be demarcated through a joint working basis with equal footing. As the border is common for both the states, strip maps and Geographic Information System (GIS) data regarding border issues shall be prepared and established jointly.
2. All the problems related to boundary demarcation shall be resolved on the principle of friendship, brotherliness, mutual respect, understanding and reciprocity.
3. Old maps, documents, coordinates and reference materials shall be used to demarcate the borders.
4. A Joint Technical Level Committee and High-Level Joint Commission with equal participation shall be formed to settle the differences if present in some segments of the borderline.
5. For the amicable settlement of the problems, Track-II diplomacy shall be adopted to find out the modality, ways and means to make study and research. A solution paper should be formed based on facts, figures and past incidents by the diplomats. For this purpose, both parties should be in contact with the counterparts of the neighbouring states.
6. A political level discussion should be conducted on the content of the solution paper and should be passed by a majority with some amendments and additions. This final paper should be adopted as the “National Boundary Diplomacy/Policy” of the nation, and this particular guideline should be accepted and articulated by the political parties, bureaucracy and technocrats of the states with the counterparts.
7. At last, the Heads of the Governments should have bilateral talks with each other on the basis of national border policy to negotiate and resolve the border demarcation problems.

8. If the high-level diplomatic negotiations cannot come into concrete conclusion, then diplomatic tactics should be initiated to seek mediation diplomacy from a third state. Both the states should entrust the issue to the mediating state.
9. If mediation diplomacy is unsuccessful or the issue is not entrusted to a third state, then the subsequent step is to seek help from international institutions or organisations, such as the United Nations Security Council or International Court of Justice. Before going to an international organisation with a petition, it is the virtue of a country to inform the neighbouring country officially.
10. Regarding border dispute issues, the states could seek the help of international organisations for the preservation of national sovereignty and upholding its integrity, if the issues cannot be negotiated, mediated and resolved amicably. There should be national consensus regarding boundary issues - no political parties or organisations or individuals shall be entertained by international organisations on the subject of boundaries (Shrestha, Border War, 2013).

Nepal's new foreign policy document- 2077 has demanded to resolve the border disputes with the help of historical records. Nepal's border diplomacy consists of two facets of the same coin. First is border demarcation diplomacy and another is border management diplomacy.

### **Nepal-India Border Demarcation Diplomacy**

The border demarcation between Nepal and India started after the Treaty of Sugauli-1816, and was later carried out in 1817-1820, 1859-1860, 1880-1883, and 1940-1941 (Baral, 2018). During the British period, Jange Border Pillars were established at every 5-7 miles. There were some blurred boundaries, because of which straight lines were not created between the pillars. To establish subsidiary and minor pillars on the zigzag boundary between two key pillars, a Nepal-India Joint Technical Level Boundary Committee was formed in 1981, which continued its work till 2007. The following is an account of the border demarcation diplomacy between Nepal and India:

1. During 1981-2007, the technical committee demarcated 97 per cent of the borderline, and 182 strip-maps (91 sheets from each side) were prepared. However, the technical committee could not resolve 3 per cent of the borderline due to the border disputes at Kalapani, Susta and some other places (Baral, 2018). The unresolved boundary constitutes nearly 38 kilometres of boundary line out of the 1,880 kilometres of border between Nepal and India.
2. At present, both the states need to prepare around 23 strip maps and have to erect and maintain 4,193 (49 per cent) pillars on the ground. Of the total

pillars established, nearly 500 (6 per cent) pillars have also been washed away by the rivers and disappeared on the ground (Nayak, 2020).

3. Of the unresolved borders between the two states, there are encroachments, disputes, cross-holding occupations, claims and counter-claims at more than 71 places of around 606 square kilometres in area. The largest encroachment is of Lipulek-Kalapani-Limpiyadhura in Darchula district, which is nearly 335 square kilometers in area. The second disputed/encroached area is Susta of about 145 square kilometres in Nawalparasi district. Besides, there are disputes, claims, counter-claims and cross-holding occupations at 69 other places comprising around 89 square kilometres of land. The smallest piece of encroachment is 240 square metres (nearly half a ropani) of land, located at Phatak of Pashupatinagar Municipality in Ilam district (Shrestha, *International Boundaries of Nepal*, 2019, p. 163).

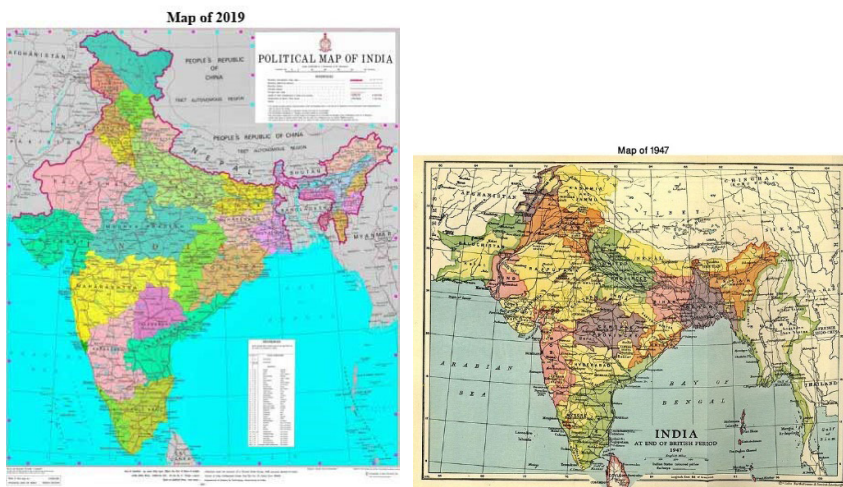
Thus, for resolving the disputes between Nepal and India, and for the management of the borders in the future, border management diplomacy should be conducted between the states effectively. The unsettled areas should be handled according to the norms of border demarcation diplomacy. Moreover, a High-Level Border Research Council consisting of former prime ministers (as chief commissioners) along with Track-II diplomats capable of explaining legal treaty, senior cartographers with knowledge in mapping international boundaries, and security professionals with experience in the norms and standards of security perception, should be formed to settle these issues (Shrestha, 2013).

Furthermore, the states must prepare national documents with facts and figures, maps and documents ascribed to previous accidents and incidents on the border issues with India and China. These documents should be discussed at the high-level political leadership, which will aid Nepal in its positive and preventive diplomacy with India. In this, everyone, including political leaders, government officials, intellectuals, activists and civic society people, must speak.

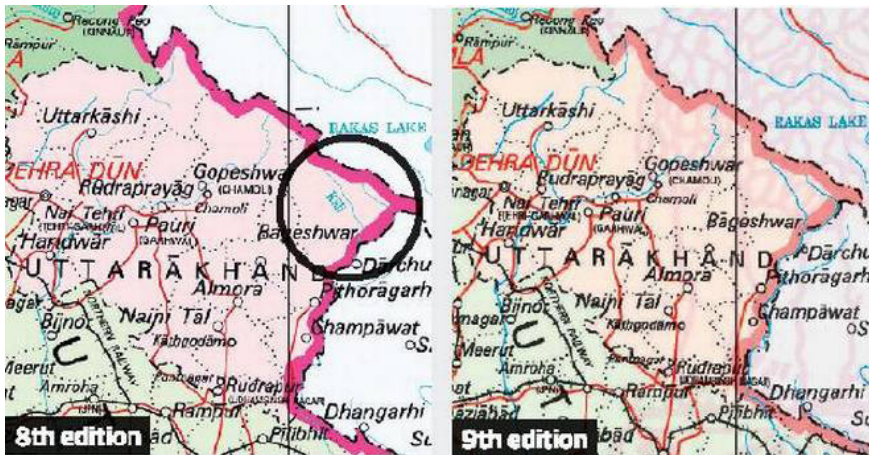
### **Issue of Political Map of India: An Explainer**

On November 2, 2019, India published a new “Political Map of India” that included the area of Lipulek-Kalapani-Limpiyadhura (Jain, 2019) within its frontier, encroaching nearly 335 square kilometres of Nepal’s territory. In response to this, there were protests and demonstrations all over Nepal against India, and even in some other parts of the world where the Nepali community and non-resident Nepalis reside. In response to the action by India, the Nepali Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a

press release on November 6 that said: “The Government of Nepal is clear that Kalapani region is an integral part of Nepal”, and that all the disputes between the two states must be settled through bilateral dialogue (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). What is important is that the earlier edition of the map entitled “At End of British Period 1947”, published by the East India Company, has depicted Kalapani region in the territory of Nepal (Bhusal, 2020).



In reply to Nepal’s press release, on November 7, 2019, Spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs of India Raveesh Kumar stated that India’s political map accurately depicts the sovereign territories of India and the new map in no manner has revised India’s boundary with Nepal (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2019). With regard to the issue, Prime Minister of Nepal K P Sharma Oli called a meeting of the leaders of all the parties, foreign policy experts and intellectuals for a meeting on November 9, which unanimously decided that Kalapani belonged to Nepal and a diplomatic solution with India was needed on the Kalapani issue. Later, India published a revised 9th edition of the map on November 18, in which the word “KALI”, which was mentioned in the previous edition, was deleted (Survey of India, 2019).



On November 23, 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal sent a diplomatic note to India suggesting a Foreign Secretary-level joint dialogue, which was previously formed on August 14, 2014 (Neupane, 2019). On the border dispute in the Lipulek-Limpiyadhura-Kalapani region, Prime Minister Oli was firm about the political map of Nepal, including the region. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defense Ishwar Pokharel made an aerial inspection of the Kalapani region from the Byas area of Nepal on February 17 (The Rising Nepal, 2020). Also, India published two maps on February 28: one in Hindi (Bharatka Rajnneetik Manchitra) and the other in Sanskrit language (Bharatasya Rajnaitik Manachitram) (Survey of India, 2020).

In the House of Representatives of Nepal, a proposal was registered to have Indian troops removed from the Nepal-India border in the Kalapani region and the encroached land returned to Nepal. It was proposed by lawmaker Khagaraj Adhikari and seconded by lawmaker Ram Kumari Jhankri. Later this agenda was removed from the discussion of the meeting of the House of Representatives on March 12, 2020 (Kantipur Daily, 2020). Further, India's cartographic manipulation to include the Lipulek-Limpiyadhura-Kalapani area into its frontier was under shadowed by the issue of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), the US-proposed assistance for Nepal, around February-March 2020. In between, the coronavirus pandemic was spreading, and the country entered into a strict lockdown from March 24, 2020 for nearly three months. Thus the issue of Indian occupation of the Kalapani area since 1962 lost focus.

The border dispute between Nepal and India heightened after Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh virtually inaugurated an 80-kilometre-long link road from Pithoragarh to Lipulek on May 8, 2020 by virtual means in the presence of Indian Army Chief and Chief of Defence Staff despite the threat of the global

pandemic (Giri, 2020). The link road has been constructed on the sovereign land of Nepal occupied by India. This incident fuelled another cycle of protests in Nepal, resulting in unprecedented unity among the Nepali people.

Concerning the border dispute, President of Nepal Bidhya Devi Bhandari, while presenting the Nepal Government's policies and programmes in the Federal Parliament on May 16, 2020, reiterated that Nepal would issue a new political map incorporating Limpiyadhura. The President emphasised that the land belonged to Nepal and that the disputes should be resolved through diplomatic measures. Accordingly, a meeting of the Council of Ministers was held on May 18, 2020, which decided to publish a new map of Nepal that included Lipulek, Limpiyadhura and Kalapani. Following the decision, the Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation officially released a new map entitled "Political and Administrative Map of Nepal" on May 20, 2020 (The Kathmandu Post, 2020).

In response, India's Ministry of External Affairs stated that Nepal's decision was a unilateral act and not based on historical facts and figures and urged the Government of Nepal to respect India's sovereignty and territorial integrity (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2020). Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh also indicated that issues including Lipulek should be resolved through dialogue between the two countries (Hindustan Times, 2020).

Nonetheless, the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs registered a constitution amendment bill at the Parliament to update the map of Nepal in the national emblem as per the new political and administrative map issued by the Government of Nepal. On June 9, 2020, the House of Representative unanimously validated the second amendment to the constitution of Nepal to update the new political and administrative map in the national emblem (Ghimire, 2020).

### **Nepal-China Border Demarcation Diplomacy**

Nepal's border with the Tibet region of China measures 1,415 kilometres along the Himalayan range. Nepal and China established diplomatic relations in 1955 and exchanged resident ambassadors in 1960. That year, Nepal experienced border conflicts with China at 35 places, including Mount Everest. On October 5, 1961, to settle its boundary disputes with China, a Nepal-China Joint Boundary Commission was established. Thus, the border between Nepal and China was demarcated jointly during 1961-1962. It was settled cordially with the spirit of friendliness, brotherhood, equality, mutual respect, and on the basis of the principles of Panchasheel. It is admirable that the disputes were resolved at the technical level.

Nevertheless, the issues over Mount Everest was settled at the prime ministerial level during the visit of Chinese Prime Minister Chou-en-Lai to Nepal on April 28, 1960. The Boundary Protocol was later signed on January 20, 1963 (Shrestha, 2003). It said the border would be regulated and maintained harmoniously by Nepal and China by following the below procedures:

1. Renewal of the Boundary Protocol shall be done every 10 years after joint inspection of the border. A joint report shall be prepared in the course of renewing the previous Protocol after joint supervision and monitoring of the borderlines.
2. Damaged and missing border pillars and markers shall be repaired and established accordingly.
3. By adopting new technology such as Global Positioning System (GPS) observations and establishment of Geographical Information System (GIS) data, new strip maps shall be prepared based on previous maps.
4. With equal cooperation of both India and China, India-Nepal-China Tri-junction Points (Zero Marker) needs to be established on both ends of the borderline (Shrestha, Border War, 2013).
5. Nepal and China share a harmonious boundary relation, and to promote this peaceful border sharing, regulated boundary monitoring and supervision are required. To manage the borders, certain managerial tasks should be performed diplomatically by both the states.

### **Border Management Diplomacy**

Border management is concerned with expediting the movement of people, goods and services legitimately across international borders. It enables legitimate travel and commerce, safeguarding human rights and encouraging human contacts. Moreover, border management includes maintaining safe and secure borders, and meeting national legal requirements. Several government organisations are involved and exercised for effective border management (Shrestha, 2003b, p. 74).

Nepal's border management diplomacy should be implemented on the foundation of dynamic equilibrium with both China and India. Late King Prithvi Narayan Shah characterised Nepal as a "yam between two boulders". But circumstances have changed, and it has to be re-defined in the shifting context of not only Nepal but also owing to the changing situations in China and India. Nepal today aims to act as a bridge between the two Asian giants (Shrestha, 2013).

### **Nepal-China Border Management Diplomacy**

Certain Nepali settlements like Chyanga and Lungdep of Kimathanka VDC of Sankhuwasabha district and some forage lands of Humla and Dolakha districts have been demarcated inside China. Also, certain Chinese land has been demarcated as belonging to the Nepali side. Presently, there are two problems between Nepal and China. The first is border marker number 57 of Lapchigaun of Lamabagar area of Dolakha district, and another is the height of Mount Everest (Jha, 2010). Nepal-China border management diplomacy should, thus, include the following concerns for harmonious border relations:

1. Nepal and China have a synchronised border management system. Yet, Tibetans illegally enter Nepal through the borders. So border management should be strengthened from both the sides to regulate illegal migration/travel.
2. Border outposts and immigration check-posts should be established close to the border crossing points, which will prevent anti-China activity from Nepali soil. At present, these posts are positioned 10-20 kilometres from the borderline. For example, Lamabagar Police Post in Dolakha district has been established 22 kilometres south of the border crossing point. It should be established at Lapche Gaun for proper monitoring.
3. Policy to increase the number of Border Observation Posts (BOPs) of the Armed Police Force should be adopted to regulate illegal Tibetan infiltration.
4. Nepali timber, Himalayan herbs including the expensive Yarsagumba of Nepal and Red Sandalwood brought from India should be inspected to stop illegal exports to the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China by establishing BOPs close to border crossing-points (Shrestha, 2013).

### **Nepal-India Border Management Diplomacy**

As Nepal and India have several border disputes, a proper border management system should be adopted through bilateral diplomatic means. Proper border management will not only ensure friendly relations between the states but also aid in the security aspect of both the countries. So, as part of border management diplomacy, the following should be implemented:

1. At the moment, an open border system is practised between Nepal and India. But from a security perspective, this system has not helped both the states. So this open border system should be transformed into a regulated system through mutual co-operation for the security of both the nations. Policies should be taken to regulate the border in a phase-wise manner.
2. To regulate the open border, the number of Armed Police Force and BOPs should be increased in the first phase. The BOP should be established near the borderline, but not on no man's land (Dasgaja Area). Currently,

several of these posts are located 2-4 kilometres from the border towards the Nepal side.

3. In the second phase, an identity card (ID card) system should be introduced for the travellers and others to cross the Nepal-India border. However, inhabitants living near the borders or within five kilometres of the borders should be permitted to cross the border several times a day.
4. In the third phase, barbed-wire fencing should be erected along the border. There needs to be 376 exit/entry crossing-points since the length of the border is 1,880 kilometres. It's the right time to standardise the Nepal-India border to prevent cross-border terrorism, criminal activities and smuggling of counterfeit Indian currency notes. Such a regulated system could be started with a joint decision as on the air route, following the hijacking of an Indian aircraft from Nepal (Shrestha, 2013).

Nepal through border diplomacy needs to manage its borders with both China and India to effectively regulate the borders to keep tabs on migration, prevent terrorist activities and other transnational organised crimes and resolve the border disputes.

### **Border Diplomacy to Resolve Border Disputes**

In terms of resolving the border dispute, especially with India, Nepal should be clear about its border diplomacy and boundary strategies to resolve the longstanding issues. In this regard, the following diplomatic approaches and strategies should be adopted:

- Nepal's principal strategy should be to sustain, insist, present and resolve the border disputes with India based on the fundamental principle of sovereign equality, and equal rights and status in the international arena as a sovereign state irrespective of size. Also, diplomatic initiatives should be taken to convince the Indian authorities and build up the confidence for a mutual understanding of the border disputes.
- The dispute should be resolved at the executive high level of the state to enhance the gravity and ensure the implementation of the results after the discussions.
- Nepal should focus on creating a congenial atmosphere and environment for India, a "face-saving strategy" in the international arena to overcome the adverse results after the discussions.
- Lobbying must be made through the Nepali embassies and Nepal's diplomatic missions abroad to garner support with persuasion for solution from the international platforms.
- A mature and experienced diplomatic medium should be the fundamental strategy to convince India to hold bilateral talks and dialogue.

- Track-II Diplomacy through diplomats and intellectuals should be practised for formal and informal dialogues with the Indian counterparts to resolve the outstanding complex border issues.
- To gather and organise evidences, a high-level border research council should be formed. The council should identify the main cause of the problems through a consultative approach, and also pinpoint the ways and means to solve the problems with alternative measures agreeable to both the states. Further, the council must prepare a “National Document on Boundaries”, a repository for future discussions (Shrestha, 2019).
- Thereafter, discussion and dialogue should be held among the political leaders on the documents and reports in a cordial manner given the sensitivity of the issue, as it is related to sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- Through the rigorous interactions among the political leaders, intellectuals, professionals and critics, all must reach a consensus that will ultimately be adopted as the national border diplomacy of Nepal.
- If the problems cannot be solved through mutual interaction and bilateral diplomatic dialogue, there should be briefings on the issue at international forums to build an environment supportive of Nepal. Thus, diplomatic activities should be aligned to create global pressure on India.
- For the settlement of disputes through peaceful means, Nepal should seek third-country mediation. If the mediation is not accepted by the neighbour, Nepal should initiate measures to resolve the issue through international organisations such as the United Nations (Security Council and Geospatial Cartographic Division) and International Court of Justice (ICJ) for safeguarding our sovereignty and territorial integrity (Shrestha, Border War, 2013).

Furthermore, Nepal’s border diplomacy should be able to anticipate the possible outcomes of the discussions and draw up strategies required to tackle the probable circumstances in the negotiations.

### **Possible Outcomes and Border Strategy**

In the bilateral discussions and dialogues, one can conjecture various possibilities and propositions by India. To handle and tackle those situations and circumstances, the concerned stakeholders should plan strategies accordingly to avoid a diplomatic conundrum or stalemate. Thus, Nepal should be prepared for the following possible circumstances and prepare a strategy:

- Nepal should prepare a comprehensive strategy if India claims that Kalapani is an integral part of India;
- A counter-strategy must be prepared in case India comes up with

documents showing how King Mahendra had handed over Kalapani to the Indian side;

- A diplomatic strategy should be formed to create an environment conducive for China to ease the situation in favour of Nepal if India claims that China has not agreed that Kalapani belongs to Nepal, as the area forms a tri-junction among the three states;
- A policy should be prepared to oppose India should it propose creating the Kalapani region as a buffer zone or no man's land;
- Nepal should be ready with a scheme if the situation leads towards leasing the region of Kalapani for a certain period;
- A strategy should be prepared to opt for a mediating third state if India proposes or accepts third-party mediation;
- An approach should be in place in the event of a confrontation, then Nepal must prepare to take the issue to international forums.

Nepal should focus on diplomatic and peaceful means to resolve the border disputes with India. But it must be able to anticipate the possible outcomes and probable situations that may arise during the negotiations, for which it will have to devise comprehensive strategies to deal with them.

### **Conclusion**

As diplomacy is an art in international politics involving actors ranging from heads of states to diplomatic envoys and the concept of border diplomacy is particularly related with border demarcation, border management and the settlement of border disputes through diplomatic means and practices, including negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, or resorting to regional agencies or arrangements or other peaceful means could be employed for the settlement of disputes. At present, there are many international boundary disputes, and one of the major ways of settling such issues is through mediation. The U.S. President has been seen eager to mediate such disputes between India and Pakistan and India and China. An integral part of border diplomacy is the demarcation of the boundary and its management. With regard to border demarcation between Nepal and its two neighbours, there are several disputes with India whereas almost all the disputes between Nepal and China have been resolved through diplomatic means. Nepal-India border dispute in the region of Lipulek-Limpiyadhura-Kalapani has hogged the limelight because of cartographic manipulation and construction of a link road through the region by India.

Thus border management diplomacy should be adopted by both the states to resolve this issue peacefully. Nepal should be prepared for all eventualities with plans, policies and strategies to claim the sovereign land back from Indian occupation diplomatically and peacefully. Moreover, a psychological and suggestive study should be conducted to get a clear public view on the alternatives of the existing border regimes for formulating policies that accommodate the peoples of both the frontiers. As the prime sufferers of any border dispute are the inhabitants close to the borders, the policies regarding integrated development, including physical, social and economic development, should be formulated and implemented. In conclusion, the border disputes should be settled diplomatically through bilateral discussion based on historical maps and documents in the spirit of mutual understanding, friendliness and good neighbourhood. Both the sides should remember that Nepal and India have historical relations with cohesive social, culture and religious connectivity, not only at the political level but also at the diplomatic level.

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# ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY FOR DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP

■ Dr Rajendra Shrestha

## Abstract

*The turn of events after the end of the Cold War called for revisiting traditional approaches to foreign policy. Shift in the world order, triggered by enhanced economic activities in the national, regional and international markets, has increased the need for coordinated economic diplomacy. Nepal, after the restoration of democracy in 1990, attempted to institutionalise and practise economic diplomacy through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its overseas missions. Exploring the leading features of economic diplomacy, this study revisits the economic diplomacy experiences of Nepal. Underscoring how a country's development success, in the globalised era, depends on the application of new skills and tactfulness in the conduct of relations by the lead ministry in the government, this paper internalises the importance of more competent and robust strategies to enhance the spirit of coordinated economic diplomacy. Hypothesising that Nepal has huge potential for development and economic growth, and prospects to conduct coordinated economic diplomacy, the study recommends strategies to strengthen coordinated economic diplomacy as a tool to advance Nepal's economic, political and strategic interests.*

**Keywords:** *Economic Diplomacy, Nepal, Strategies, State Actors, Non-state Actors*

## Introduction

Global politics underwent a paradigm shift after the end of World War II. As the world community witnessed increasing incompetence of state-centric economic models, economic prosperity through the participation of the private sector, international agreements and linkages gained widespread admiration (Booth, 2018). The rapid turn of events in the social, political and economic dimension led to a significant intellectual shift, away from the conventional approach to foreign policy. As a result, economic diplomacy came to the forefront in the late 1990s (Lee & Hocking, 2010), which is the most important and popular

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aspect of conducting international relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although economic diplomacy involves the use of economic resources and cooperation between states for mutual benefit, the US-China trade war, today, is the biggest geopolitical schism (Zirovcic 2016). Economic interdependence has become a double-edged sword where “conflict of logic in the commerce of grammar”, as American political scientist Edward Luttwak described, will result in no winners (Kapustina, Lipková, Silin, & Drevalev, 2020). Nonetheless, even when political relations between the two countries become acrimonious, economic diplomacy can play a significant role in neutralising the situation (Zirovcic 2016). Economic diplomacy allows a state to achieve its economic interests “tactfully, politely, carefully, cleverly and cunningly” (Okano-Heijmans, 2011). It stimulates the state’s economic interests, creates a viable and profitable environment for economic cooperation among different actors, and expands its sphere of influence. It not only involves trade and investment but also entails mobilising international assistance to resolve conflicts.

Relations between states are enhanced when diplomatic skills are combined with economic tools to further a country’s political, economic and strategic goals. More clearly, it is deployed for improving import-export relations, promoting national economic interest, informing potential foreign investors about investment opportunities, negotiating economic and trade cooperation to eliminate problematic divergences and harmonising standards in various sectors, e.g., economic, social, environment and education, among others (Okano-Heijmans, 2011). Economic diplomacy includes political involvement, especially high-ranking politicians (ministers), along with bureaucrats; sharing of duties and responsibilities by involving non-state actors, including private business and civil society; transparency during the implementation of a policy to broaden understanding and support by society; and use of facilities and provisions of international institutions and organisations to ensure implementation of economic goals (Economic Diplomacy, 2013). It is exercised at the bilateral, regional and multilateral levels, and requires tactfulness to exert influence on foreign government policy and regulatory decisions. Economic diplomacy at the bilateral level is exercised with the help of agreements on trade, investment, employment, taxation and a wide range of formal and informal economic regulations between two countries. Bilateral free trade agreements are signed and implemented between countries. Similarly, economic diplomacy at the regional level is concerned with agreements between more than two countries in a region driven by geographical proximity and homogeneity. The removal of barriers and the opening of markets become easier within a regional framework. A region with connectivity and homogeneity enhances national

economic interests and boosts economic liberalisation, which highlights the growing importance of regional cooperation in economic diplomacy (Wolff, 2017). Economic diplomacy at the multilateral level operates with trade regimes such as within the framework of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Since its establishment in 1995, trade between countries is increasingly governed by international regulations. International economic and financial organisations, such as the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and various UN agencies, promote a multilateral form of economic diplomacy (Lee & Hocking, 2010). Thus, economic diplomacy encompasses the economic and commercial aspects of traditional diplomacy and focusses on the interdependence and interconnectedness of state and non-state actors, such as trade and investment promotion bodies, chambers of commerce and civil society in the international system.

Apprehending the increasing level of reciprocity and interdependence, a coordinated economic diplomacy strategy suits Nepal to bolster its development and economic growth. Therefore, engaging with literature on economic diplomacy and strategies to enhance coordination among the actors, this study revisits Nepal's economic diplomacy practices and presents robust strategies to enhance the economic diplomacy strategies for Nepal.

### **Methodology**

As a qualitative research, this study reviews Nepal's economic diplomacy practices and recommends coordinated economic diplomacy for Nepal's development and economic growth. Methodologically, a systematic, subjective and holistic approach has been opted. The author has also included details from the consultations and discussions of the High-Level Task Force/MOFA (2017/18). The consultations were held with the MOFA division heads, overseas mission heads, including present/former diplomats, relevant line ministries, private sector, Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), political leaders and civil society. Academic literature on economic diplomacy was referred to for the study, and data were collected from reports of the ministries, National Planning Commission, NTB and other agencies.

### **Results:**

#### **Nepal's Experience with Economic Diplomacy**

Nepal attempted to adjust its foreign policy after the restoration of multi-party democracy in 1990. Towards this end, it established a division under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) intending to institutionalise economic diplomacy (Dahal, Sainju, Lohani, Sharma, & Parajuli, 2008). A

broad concept of “development diplomacy”, which includes policy dialogue and policy negotiation in international development, has been the principle of MOFA to further Nepal’s development agenda in the international sphere (Pokharel, 2017). At present, the Policy Planning, Development Diplomacy and Overseas Nepalese Affairs Division at MOFA, along with its overseas missions, is responsible for Nepal’s economic diplomacy. The division’s main task is to focus on promoting and improving foreign trade, investment, technology transfer, tourism, development cooperation, foreign employment and climate change (MOFA, 2020). MOFA’s efforts and effectiveness to engage in economic diplomacy have been questioned and criticised. The results of more than two decades have been obscure as evidenced by the minimal rise in national GDP. Budgetary and inadequate resources have often been cited by officials for their poor performance. But what is lacking is committed leadership and skills in managing negotiations and public relations in international forums. Firstly, the allocated budget for activities to promote economic diplomacy by the Government of Nepal (GON) is NRs 140 million (Giri, 2020), which is not sufficient to implement plans and strategies. Secondly, GON has overlooked actions and policies required to increase FDI, foreign employment, tourists, and narrow the trade deficit. It is instead focused on setting a wish list rather than applying real efforts (Dahal R. K., 2018). Thirdly, economic diplomacy practices are limited to lobbying in the host country for favourable policies towards Nepal, including lobbying for priority destination country for tourists, removing quota restrictions on Nepali products and entering into bilateral agreements to ensure labour safety, security and dignity in the labour destination countries. Nepal’s Millennium Development Goal (MDG) experience, planning and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the country’s target to graduate from a least developed country (LDC) by 2022 to a middle-income country by 2030 are, however, noteworthy attempts. (National Planning Commission, 2016).

Economic diplomacy is an indispensable instrument to secure Nepal’s foreign policy objectives and economic advancement. The country’s ability to engage in economic diplomacy for national prosperity can be facilitated by leveraging its abundant natural resource base, rich biodiversity and cultural heritage. Besides, a booming service sector and rising private business enterprises equally contribute to creating a distinct possibility for Nepal to boost trade and investment opportunities through international relations (Yadav, 2018). As a member of global trade regimes such as the WTO and regional and sub-regional forums, including SAARC, BIMSTEC, BBIN, BRI, etc., it has utilised trade privileges such as duty-free and quota-free access (Sharma, 2018). At present, GON engages in development/economic diplomacy at three levels: bilateral, regional and multilateral. The country has directed diplomatic efforts and set

up targets to increase the level of engagement with friendly states to market goods and services, and implement and review periodic plans, SDG agenda and a LDC advancement strategy. Nepal has planned and implemented a sustainable, inclusive and green growth-oriented development strategy for the coming decades to achieve a higher per capita income, reduce poverty, enhance human capital and improve the living standards of vulnerable populations.

There is recognition within GON that coordination between the various ministries is essential. However, the High-Level Committee at MOFA has not been effective. Policymakers have not laid out a framework for identifying destination countries for global export, ways to attract foreign investment and other forms of economically beneficial exchanges where Nepal enjoys a comparative advantage. This can only happen through coordinated and cooperative collaboration of the relevant line ministries and non-state actors such as trade and investment promotion bodies, chambers of commerce and civil society. To compound the problem, MOFA does not have the capacity to engage other line ministries and non-state actors to tackle the diverse and complex issues. As a result, there is coordination failure with the stakeholders in Nepal and missions abroad. For instance, comparative advantage and economy of scale are important considerations for the Ministry of Finance as it is related to the economic policy at home. However, the role of overseas missions in attracting foreign business and negotiating free trade and/or preferential trade agreements is largely ignored by the Ministry of Finance. Another example of coordination failure is in implementing tourism promotion activities. MOFA must coordinate with the NTB, which has a large budget allocated for tourism promotion. The NTB not only promotes attractive destinations within Nepal but also carries out promotional activities abroad and provides published materials to overseas missions, but often without input and participation of MOFA or overseas missions. There is no coordination or synergy in the effort (Pandey & Dhakal, 2019). Furthermore, MOFA has not demonstrated leadership to drive economic diplomacy. It has not kept abreast with new modes of diplomacy, which mandates going beyond pursuing state-centric analyses of primarily political agendas to searching for competitive advantage in the world economy. Also, overseas mission staff lack new skills and are also constrained by communication barriers, especially where knowledge of the local language is important, i.e., Gulf countries, China, Russia and Japan, among others.

Another reason for the ineffectiveness of our economic diplomacy is not only related to the practices but also to the inability of Nepali industries and exporters to meet import demand due to supply constraints (Asian Development Bank, 2020). Diplomats and overseas missions must inform the Ministry of Finance, trade and investment promotion bodies, chambers of commerce and policymakers about international trade regulations. And as the occasion demands and opportunity permits, they must have the capacity to negotiate

international trade regulations to Nepal's benefit. In essence, diplomats and overseas missions must acquire new skills for directing private investments towards products considering demand, competitiveness, advantage and cultural specificity (Wolff, 2017).

### **Coordinated Strategy for Strengthening Economic Diplomacy**

Nepal's geo-political and geo-economic situation remains a major determinant in the conduct of relations with other states. Its geostrategic position warrants country-specific treaties. For instance, while a comprehensive long-term strategy regulating relations between India and China is essential, engagement with the US and EU would be different, as would with the Gulf countries and Malaysia (Dahal, 2018). Overseas missions are key players in negotiations and in disseminating the uniqueness of Nepal in the international economy. In the pursuit of economic security, especially as the country is highly dependent on remittance, new marketing strategies are needed to promote Nepal as a tourism destination. Congruent strategies for foreign employment are important, and the same goes for FDI and trade (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

MOFA and overseas missions need to have a clearer understanding of the interdependence of economic, political and social issues, and the linkages between state and non-state players in the international system (Bhattarai, 2018). Private sector engagement stems from the need to remain competitive as trade between states is increasingly being governed by international regulations (National Planning Commission, 2019). Involvement of civil society on the other hand becomes necessary to ensure that the interests of grassroots stakeholders are taken into account in international negotiations. Hence, the strategy for coordinated economic diplomacy includes:

#### **Institutional Preparedness and Coordination**

Strengthening MOFA's institutional capacity and preparedness for this role is of paramount importance. Improving managerial capacity and acquiring new knowledge and negotiation skills are a prerequisite in the practice of economic diplomacy. Effective economic diplomacy not only mandates institutional preparedness of MOFA but also of other ministries and organisations, such as the ministries of Finance, Industry, Commerce and Supplies, the Office of the Prime Minister, NTB and other relevant agencies. To realise this, integrated and effective coordination operating under a broad framework with clear operating procedures is required.

Research and development (R&D) through strong and dynamic think tanks, such as the Institute for Foreign Affairs (IFA), can support coordination and articulation framework. One way to improve coordination is by forming policy networks drawn from different line ministries, including trade and investment

promotion bodies, for multilateral, regional and bilateral engagements. Such networks provide business intelligence, tourism marketing and partner searches. Towards this end, GON must identify bilateral economic and development partners and formulate an actor-specific strategy to optimise bilateral relations; regularly evaluate economic relations between Nepal and development partner countries and identify benefits and shortcomings; formulate basic development policies and periodic development plans within the framework of the long-term development perspective and programmes of the National Planning Commission; set up annual targets with objective indicators and assess plans and policies; intensify implementation of action plans through innovation and analysis and assess current trends and economic relations with partner countries; evaluate feedback collected from non-state actors, including trade and investment promotion bodies, chambers of commerce, related stakeholders, and building partnership with them in implementing strategies; attract Nepali diaspora to invest in Nepal; carry out economic negotiations and initiate a memorandum of understanding for economic cooperation; perform periodic reviews and updates of the agreements and MoUs; and conduct a thorough analysis of the possible impact of partner states' economic policies and raise voice against possible adverse impact.

To enable MOFA in playing a catalytic role in ensuring synergy in policies and plans, the focus is on securing a commitment from the sector ministries and building a strong and functional mechanism at a high level for inter-ministerial cooperation and coordination; regular interaction, dialogue and consultations with the concerned sectors, including politicians, bureaucrats, business and trade unions, NGOs and donors; building a critical pool of staff with new skills and knowledge on economic diplomacy; regular assessment of feedback from the private sector, such as the FNCCI, Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI), Nepal Chamber of Commerce and others. Activities that are specifically needed to improve performance in economic diplomacy include:

- Playing a proactive and assertive role in coordinating different agencies and stakeholders related to economic affairs to make the work of MOFA and overseas missions efficient and effective;
- Holding regular consultation between concerned MOFA officials, especially desk officers, and missions abroad and promptly responding to the communications received;
- Organising at least a biennial visit by MOFA officials to the missions;
- Preparing, updating and sharing with overseas missions briefing materials on trade, investment, tourism, foreign assistance and other related areas, including materials prepared by other agencies/missions;
- Formulating a policy to recruit local staff with local language capability,

including lawyers, especially in countries where missions have to deal with legal issues;

- Training MOFA staff on economic diplomacy through an institutional set-up focussing on making missions business-friendly, imparting knowledge in the areas of trade, investment, tourism, customs procedure, company registration, economic priorities;
- Providing pre-departure training to diplomats posted in the missions, including a separate module to cater to country-specific needs and situation;
- Preparing Terms of Reference (TOR) for ambassadors, clearly stating the goals and priorities for promoting the country's economic interests and enhancing economic ties with the country of assignment;
- Monitoring the efforts of diplomats through a process of incentives and disincentives to make them accountable (High-Level Foreign Policy Task Force, 2006);
- Encouraging diplomats and missions to work with like-minded countries in restructuring and reforming financial institutions in favour of the developing, least developed and landlocked developing states (Dahal, Sainju, Lohani, Sharma & Parajuli, 2008);

### **Multilateral and Regional Engagements**

A systematic approach and a clear framework for cooperation, coordination and management should be established for multilateral, regional and bilateral engagements. There are different multilateral and international agreements such as the WTO, United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Paris Agreement on Climate Change, etc. Also, international financial institutions facilitate freedom of transit and enable preferential trade for the Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) (World Bank, 2014). One major and effective level of economic engagement other than bilateral is regional and multilateral arrangements. Regional agreements such as the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) and South Asia Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) and regional/sub-regional organisations such as BIMSTEC and BBIN can strategically maximise advantage regarding connectivity, reduce non-tariff barriers in exports and enhance transit facilities, tourism, electricity, trade and investment. Thus, through these instruments on trade and transit facilitation, Nepal could benefit economically and boost Nepal's economic diplomacy (South Asia Sub regional Economic Cooperation, 2019).

Creating new alliances and building networks of business groups based in overseas missions are crucial for economic stability. Nepal can engage with other South Asian countries through regional trade agreements and strengthen the existing regional trade instruments, viz. SAFTA, SAARC and SAPTA (SWATEE, 2007). Also through economic diplomacy, Nepal has the potential to enter new foreign markets outside south Asia through the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and sub-regional organisations like BBIN (South Asia Sub regional Economic Cooperation, 2019). Exploiting and accessing new markets for goods and services is becoming increasingly urgent in view of the fact that the country's economy is heavily dependent on India. At the multilateral level, the focus should be on securing fair competition for Nepali products in the international market. This can be facilitated by participating in exhibitions, fairs in the targeted countries, organising international forums to attract export promotion and developing a strategy for lobbying to defend national economic interests (South Asia Sub regional Economic Cooperation, 2019). Similarly, civil society must be enabled so that they can also operate at the regional and multilateral level. The multilateral strategy includes increasing interaction and interdependence of national economies, multinational corporations and international organisations for Nepal (SWATEE, 2007).

Overall, at both the regional and multilateral level the focus is on facilitating trade and business investment, promoting Nepal as a diversified tourist destination, easing the movement of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour force, and cooperating in science and technology, including research and development.

### **Technology Transfer**

Access to technology and its adoption in economic development to a large degree decide a country's competitive position in the international labour division (Booth, 2018). Hence, economic diplomacy should incorporate technology transfer for improving productive capacity and structural transformation. It includes innovation, open economic policies for investment and securing intellectual property rights, among others. Nepal should pursue approaches for access to and transfer of technology, including sharing and disseminating knowledge and skills, and economic diplomacy focussing on the transfer of scientific discoveries, production methods and other innovations at affordable terms and conditions. Engaging proactively with UN technology banks for the LDCs would be an added asset (NPC and ADB, 2016).

Nepal's aspiration to be a vibrant bridge between the two Asian giants and the prospect of trilateralism could be realised through coordinated economic diplomacy with other technologically advanced states through technology transfer. Also, Nepal's trade should be focussed on technological information learning capacity, and the strategy should focus on inviting Multinational Enterprises (MNEs), as quite often MNEs transfer technological information to their affiliates, some of which may "leak" into Nepal's economy. Another major technological strategy for Nepal through coordinated economic diplomacy could be direct trade in knowledge via technology licensing (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2013).

As technology transfer also depends upon people's movement, the Nepali diaspora, NRN and other Nepalis working abroad can become a channel for technology transfer. International movement of Nepali people associated with studying or working abroad for a limited period and applying their new knowledge when they return or the movement of foreign nationals into the country is another potential channel for technology transfer, and thus Nepal's economic diplomacy should focus on these. Technology-related policies should be friendlier for the foreign investors, while the national policies should be welcoming for international cooperation (Westphal, 2006). Therefore, there are diverse areas for technology transfer, technological progress and innovation in countries at different levels of development. So Nepal's coordinated economic diplomacy must incorporate strategies for technology transfer and innovation.

### **Sector Promotion**

Nepal's export of goods and services was 8.93% (of GDP) while import of goods and services was 42.38% in 2019 (World Bank, 2019). Similarly, its trade deficit stood at NRs 69,737.30 million in May 2020 (Trading Economics, 2020). To address these challenges, GON has promoted foreign trade, in general, and export trade, in particular. Export promotion can be supported by analysing the market situation in the destination states to competitively and advantageously benefit and increase export; seeking support from the Nepali diaspora, private sector and agencies like the Trade and Export Promotion Centre (TEPC) to develop a trade promotion strategy (Trade and Export Promotion Centre, 2020); promoting visits of delegations of Nepali exporters with the involvement of overseas missions; follow-up by overseas missions on deliberations and decisions of the delegation's meetings with the host country; providing information regarding export products, branding, etc., through interaction with the chambers of commerce; encouraging Nepali delegations to participate in trade shows and exhibitions by providing information on such

events to relevant organisations and individuals; creation of duty drawback schemes and increasing the availability of short and long-term credits to Nepali exporters; simplifying trade regulations, improving cooperation among economic actors and combining short-term and long-term export growth policies (Richter, 2017).

Sector promotion seeks regular market analysis by MOFA with the assistance of the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies, and the private sector. The obtained information should be shared with missions abroad. Periodic analysis enhances trade promotion and identifies a priority commodity for promotion. A specific-purpose and interest-based visit and participation in trade fairs and exhibitions should be conducted. Also, Nepal should hold trade fairs and exhibitions of an international nature to promote trade, and the cost should be shared by GON to create a conducive environment for trade promotion (Pant, 2011).

### **Investment Promotion**

Nepal should focus on increasing investment, including commercial loans, official flows, foreign direct investment (FDI) and foreign portfolio investment (FPI) to enhance economic growth. Though foreign investments are increasing in Nepal, net FDI inflow is 0.23% (of GDP) in 2018 (World Bank, 2018). Thus, FDI promotion should be the major priority to enhance economic development. Economic diplomacy should be carried out by disseminating information about Nepal's potential as an FDI destination country by updating details about priority sectors, available projects and market situation; making investors aware of GON's adoption of the concept of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), Industrial Estates and potential trade corridors in Nepal; taking advantage of the Everything But Arms (EBA) initiative under the EU Generalised System of Preferences, preference given by India and proximity to large Indian and Chinese markets (Bhandari, 2014); regulating amendments by GON regarding legal and procedural improvements on the Industrial Enterprise Act, Companies Act, SEZ Act, Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Act and Labour Act (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2003); encouraging and promoting visits of business delegations from potential FDI source countries and facilitating contacts with government agencies and potential partners, if the partner country is willing to invest, then facilitating contacts with local partners (Aryal, 2018); providing information to potential investors of facilities provided to ensure the protection and enhancement of companies or projects; promoting and safeguarding the corporate interest of investment partners in Nepal's interest; providing successful FDI case studies

(like accounting firms of multinationals, Kobold watch, Incessant Rain, Cloud factory) to encourage investment in Nepal (Booth, 2018).

### **Intensification of Tourism Promotion**

Nepal enjoys comparative advantage in tourism. The world's highest peaks, national parks rich in flora and fauna, snow-fed rivers, exceptional trekking routes, religious and cultural diversity, and adventure tourism place Nepal among the top destinations for tourism. Hence, economic diplomacy must include strategies to boost tourism. Examples to support the development of tourism include increasing government expenditure in the tourism sector for new infrastructure, such as airports, trails, tourism attractions and facilities; attracting investment from the private sector in creating tourism facilities; organising international tourism promotional campaigns, activities and festivals in various parts of Nepal and the world through overseas missions, through collaboration and coordination with relevant government ministries, non-governmental agencies, travel trade entrepreneurs and other stakeholders; applying sustainable development principles in tourism by minimising the environmental impact and maximising local ownership; promoting Nepal as a destination country through campaigns in partnership with overseas missions and the private sector; accelerating regional tourism in source markets like India, China and southeast Asia (Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2019).

### **Labour Diplomacy**

Nepal has signed bilateral labour agreements and MoUs with nine countries as of July 2019, of which most are less binding in nature. However, Nepal sends youths and workers to more than 110 countries (Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, 2020). In the absence of a MoU or an agreement with a host country, Nepali workers' rights cannot be protected. Hence, there is an urgent need for signing country-specific labour agreements to protect the welfare of Nepali workers. Alternatively, Nepal could attract these countries to establish training centres in Nepal so that there is a match in skills required for the host country. The prospect of well-trained human resources may attract them to sign labour agreements with Nepal (Luitel, 2013).

One of the objectives of the overseas mission is protecting Nepali migrants, and accordingly, the staff are assigned specific tasks for meeting this purpose. However, missions in this particular service have not been effective for lack of communication skills in the local language. A policy to hire local staff could be introduced, which is also cost-effective. As the labour market is highly

competitive, the search for labour markets should be coordinated with the Foreign Employment Promotion Board to promote foreign employment in a professional, safe and ethical manner (International Organization for Migration, 2019). To protect Nepali migrant workers and enhance foreign employment, there is a need to sign mutually beneficial MoUs with labour receiving countries, where agreements reflect the provisions in international treaties/covenants, address migrant workers' concerns in the destination countries and reflect agreements reached in regional consultations; address and resolve labour issues in the host country promptly by removing constraints in Nepal and overseas missions; equip missions with local staff having sufficient language and other skills; review and update existing labour agreements, especially those that have failed to protect the interests of Nepali workers; assess recruitment fees and the process to make it friendly and easy to facilitate foreign employment; set up a high-level implementation, monitoring and evaluation mechanism to ensure effective, safe, professional and ethical foreign employment. MOFA and its overseas missions should explore the possibility of reducing the cost of migration, which is one of the highest for Nepali workers. As there is high competition in the international labour market, diversified foreign employment opportunities need to be properly analysed for better human rights conditions and salary/benefits (Luitel, 2013). Enhancing skills and establishing training centres with support and/or accreditation of the host countries should be explored.

### **Foreign Assistance**

Nepal's economy and development projects are highly dependent on foreign assistance. Economic diplomacy and foreign assistance are related to the nation's economy and prosperity, especially for a developing country (Aryal, 2018). Thus, missions abroad should be mobilised for identifying and taking support from the development partners. As a first step, all diplomats and overseas missions should be made aware of Nepal's priority areas for assistance, strategy for achieving the SDGs, graduating from a LLDC and becoming a middle-income country by 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2019). In line with this, missions need to focus on attracting more assistance in Nepal's priority areas (infrastructure, productive capacity, employment generation, capacity-building) rather than technical assistance for policy and governance issues through negotiations and consultations (NPC and ADB, 2016); keeping abreast of partner outlook on investment sectors, and disseminating Nepal's perspective to them; analysing the context of changing foreign assistance policy in international society; securing non-conditional assistance under the framework of relevant declarations, and developing

action plans for aid effectiveness; acquiring aid for projects and programmes with substantial resources, and which can have a significant impact on the country's priority areas; identifying and exploring new avenues and sources of aid, and facilitating their entry into Nepal (Asian Development Bank, 2020); prioritising the short- and long-term aid priorities of Nepal to the development partners; securing as much assistance as possible from priority funding schemes applicable to Nepal as a LDC (UNESCAP, 2018); expediting disbursement of agreed assistance; and encouraging only "reputed" INGOs to enter and operate in Nepal. To increase foreign assistance, Nepal could focus on formulating economy-wide and sector perspective plans, ensure transparency and accountability, enhance quality aid, and strengthen aid coordination while promoting institutional effectiveness (NPC & ADB, 2016). Similarly, Nepal can improve foreign assistance through improved project planning and implementation, evaluation, impact study, and supervision and monitoring.

Also, the Nepali diaspora in coordination with MOFA can engage in economic development and diplomacy. GON through MOFA can effectively mobilise the Nepali diaspora community to secure foreign assistance by mapping Nepali diaspora locations and skills for advocacy and lobbying; opening a regular channel of communication with the diaspora through the NRN Secretariat and engaging them in regular dialogue (Aryal, 2018); focussing on diaspora capital markets and encouraging them to invest directly; developing a mechanism of "Diaspora Knowledge Network" to tap their knowledge and networking with politicians and business communities in their country of residence to promote Nepal's economic agenda; encouraging the concept of "Diaspora Philanthropy" through cultural centres established by them in different cities of the world to promote Nepal's soft power diplomacy through culture and tourism (Boyle & Kitchin, 2013); updating NRN Rules 2009 to clarify unclear/confusing interpretation of the current NRN Act 2008 in line with the provisions of Nepal's constitution; creating a "Diaspora Corp" for knowledge transfer (Booth, 2018); and supporting returnee migrants to create jobs in Nepal (So far, there are no specific schemes promoted by the public sector to channel migrants' investment in the productive sector) (High-Level Foreign Policy Task Force, 2006).

### **Partnership with the Private Sector**

Nepal's 15<sup>th</sup> Five-year Development Plan from 2019/2020 to 2023/24 AD expects the private sector to invest nearly 55.5%, or NRs 5,135.41 billion, the government 39.1%, or NRs 3,613.32 billion, and the cooperative sector 5.4% (NPC, 2019). This demonstrates that efforts to promote economic

diplomacy cannot be effective without partnership with the private sector. Its role in economic diplomacy could be enhanced by strengthening the existing institutional mechanism for regular dialogue between GON and the private sector, both at MOFA and in overseas missions; formulating a strategy for a result-oriented partnership for promoting trade, tourism, investment and employment; creating a strong agency in MOFA consisting of the head of the umbrella body of the private sector, secretaries of the related sectoral ministries and professionals to functionally link the private sector and MOFA, embassies and missions (Shrestha, 2006); planning and implementing joint promotional and business activities; and promoting foreign visits of Nepali business delegations and facilitating/hosting their meetings in missions.

Also, the private sector in collaboration with the government can promote local economic development by utilising local knowledge, skills, and resources and link it with long-term economic growth. The government should collaborate with trade and investment promotion bodies and pool its resources with the private sector for promotional programmes related to economic diplomacy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). Moreover, proper coordination and consultation with the private sector before formulating plans and policies are essential. A strong private sector with strong leadership can contribute to effective and coordinated economic diplomacy through collaboration and cooperation with the private sector in different states. The private sector can help bring in FDI as well as in technology transfer (Basnyat, 2011). Thus, the private sector has a big role to play in economic diplomacy than just investing money.

### **Business-friendly Missions**

One primary objective of overseas missions is to develop and promote economic relations between the home and host countries and maximise the benefits from such relations. Thus, missions should create an environment that is welcoming and friendly to business promotion. Missions should be equipped with information related to opportunities available to the investors and analyse market efficiency and competitiveness in the host country (Rana & Chatterjee, 2011). Their role is to facilitate. Tasks include maintaining a comprehensive and updated website; responding promptly to business enquiry; introducing relevant people and agencies from home to host country business people; helping create contacts and linkages with business communities; supporting consular/consul general offices to make them effective and monitoring their activities; and maintaining a business network with a comprehensive mailing list of relevant people in the host country; MOFA, on its part, must develop

a mechanism to monitor and collect information on current issues or theme papers prepared by various agencies and share them with its missions.

### **Networking**

Strengthening networks and creating a sphere of influence are an important aspect of economic diplomacy (Kostecki & Naray, 2007). Therefore, the focus is on creating networks not only with the governments of other countries but also with multinational corporations, development partners, financing institutions and even individuals (Bhattarai, 2018). Regional and multilateral platforms are one of the important instruments to promote networking, but other agencies can also enhance networking. Say, for example, “Friends of Nepal”, which provides a platform for networking and sharing information. Networking can be strengthened by establishing a caucus of parliamentarians on issues related to Nepal through the support of overseas missions and organising regular briefings to them and their staff on Nepal; emphasising policies that enhance foreign investment and trade with Nepal; developing connections with the chambers of commerce of other countries and organising interactions with them; preparing a list of potential investors, commercial institutions and personalities and interacting with them in person to build trust and confidence; establishing linkages with think tanks and universities, especially those with a focus on Nepal studies; maintaining a list of “Nepal lovers and supporters” and communicating with them; keeping regular contact with government officials in the network of a mission; using NRN and the Nepali diaspora to promote linkages with various stakeholders; and creating a stakeholder database to institutionalise such networking.

### **Monitoring and Supervision**

Monitoring and supervision of plans and policies and, if necessary, rethinking about them are important for efficient economic diplomacy. For this, MOFA should have clear guidelines to enable it to assess and monitor activities. Autonomy to conduct and take the necessary steps for improving economic diplomacy should be the purview of the division under MOFA. Other divisions of the concerned ministries and the High-Level Economic Diplomacy Implementation and Monitoring Committee under the chairmanship of the foreign minister should be made effective to independently monitor progress. Equally, the secretary-level committee representing all the concerned line ministries should be formed for multi-sector support and direction (Dahal, Sainju, Lohani, Sharma, & Parajuli, 2008). Its task includes assessing policy announcements of the host countries vis-à-vis Nepal and the potential for partnership.

## **Conclusion**

This study has discovered that in the context of an increasingly globalised world, where states cannot escape economic interdependence, and economic diplomacy has become the unavoidable reality of 21st century international relations, the intricacies of the interactions among the state and non-state actors imply that economic diplomacy cannot be compartmentalised into separate economic or geo-economic realities of countries like Nepal, making it crucial to formulate and implement economic diplomacy to maximise benefits from international relations. This study also identified that the main focus of economic diplomacy should be on trade promotion, investments, technology transfer and tourism. Current trends in a globalising economy warrant enhancing collaboration between the state and non-state actors, given the increased importance shown to international trade rules and regulations, which need to be negotiated and implemented.

Thus, it has been realised that coordinated diplomacy must be built around networks drawn from several government ministries as well as the private sector and civil society. Regarding this, MOFA should expand its institutional capabilities to drive economic diplomacy and find ways to interact effectively with other line ministries and non-state actors. Success to a large extent will depend on new skills, capability, tact and versatility of the staff engaged in the conduct of economic diplomacy. Therefore, Nepal's coordinated economic diplomacy strategies should retrospectively learn from its economic diplomacy practices and experiences. And to strengthen coordinated economic diplomacy in the changing world, it should focus on institutional preparedness and coordination, increase multilateral and regional engagements, enhance technology transfer strategies, emphasise sectoral investment and tourism promotion, strengthen labour diplomacy, attract foreign assistance, prioritise partnership with the private sector, promote business-friendly missions, and, importantly, concentrate on networking, monitoring and supervision.

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# CHARTING A NEW DIRECTION AND STRATEGY IN NEPAL'S FOREIGN POLICY

■ Dr Nishchal Nath Pandey

## Abstract

*Despite assorted contributions to the understanding of how Nepal's foreign policies are formulated, and how different actors and factors shape and implement them, foreign policy research remains largely centered in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But it doesn't mean that the increasing importance of other actors can be ignored. Thus, this paper aims to discuss a dire need to revamp our institutional structures regarding foreign policy decision-making and implementation to suit the new challenges and opportunities that have come on the way because of changes and transformation in the global and national politics. This research identifies the growing number of actors in foreign policy decision-making and implementation along with the changing geopolitical and geo-economic scenario of Nepal, and concurrently reiterates that Nepal must comprehensively overview the efficacy of other ministries and departments that influence foreign policy making and implementation to bring into synergy. Hypothesising that Nepal's foreign engagement can be robust with policy coordination and structural change, the paper gives a way forward to improve and adapt to the changes, and chart a new direction for Nepal's foreign relations.*

**Keywords:** Foreign Policy, Actors, Policy Coordination, Structural Change,

## Introduction

Every state aims to formulate long-term and short-term goals, chiefly to capitalise on the benefits it can gain from the established system. Only through an efficient foreign policy and effective implementation of the policy through diplomacy can a state preserve its sovereignty, territorial integrity and promote the national interest. Essentially, for small powers like Nepal, although there are limited foreign policy choices regarding international politics, Nepal has perpetually endeavoured to optimise national interest through foreign policy implementation and international engagements. Similarly, increase in the actors, either state or non-state (international, inter-governmental, private and transnational), in global politics has consequences for foreign policy theory and practice (Stengel & Baumann, 2017). Because of the increased

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number of actors and platforms in foreign policy decision-making, systematic approaches like neorealism and constructivism have difficulties in adapting to the realities of foreign policy. Even the growing interdependence among the states due to globalisation and the structural and institutional changes as a by-product of these varying aspects have added actors within the state and in the international environment (Stares, Jia, Tocci, Jaishankar, & Kortunov, 2020). For Nepal and its international engagements, foreign policy actors previously were solely the executive heads, the king or the prime ministers of the country. They used to practise foreign policy and diplomacy through several institutional structures, which adapted to the changing dynamics in different periods. Retrospectively, Nepal's international engagement was limited to Tibet and British India before 1816, but after the consequences of the Anglo-Nepal War (1814-1816), Nepal's international relations paradigm was limited to British India and Britain, which became more prominent during the Rana regime. Only after the introduction of democracy in Nepal in 1951, the foreign relations of Nepal became robust and expanded in the latter days (Joshi & Rose, 2004).

In the latter decades, Nepal has gone through several changes and transitions. Similarly, the international system has also gone through several systematic modifications. The traditional diplomatic practices have gone through alterations, and the actors in foreign policy decision-making have substantially surged up. Now, the question arises: with the increase in the number of actors and also Nepal's international engagements, has Nepal structurally transformed and coordinated its policies with these changes?

The best way to answer this question is to engage with the works of literature related to Nepal's foreign policy, its geopolitical importance and the changing nature of foreign policy and diplomacy. This work concentrates specifically on those issues that Nepal's foreign policy research has ignored, namely with the increase in the state actors as a result of changes in domestic and international politics. Thus, the study aims to identify the increasing number of actors in foreign policy decision-making and implementation and provide recommendations on policy coordination and structural change to cope with these changes.

### **Methodology**

The paper attempts to make a critical analysis of Nepal's foreign policy, diplomacy, institutional structure and regional and international engagements. The paper has also made a retrospective and diachronic analysis of international affairs and Nepal's engagement in those affairs. The paper is

based on information collected, especially through secondary data, like books and journals related to Nepal's foreign policy by prominent academicians, diplomats and analysts. The comparative, evaluative and analytical methods for the study have included ideas, assumptions and analysis for the structural reforms and policy coordination recommendations.

### **New Actors in Foreign Policy Decision-making of Nepal**

Nepal's foreign affairs and international relations are one of the oldest in the world. From Jaisi Kotha to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nepal developed and modified several institutional structures for international engagements. In Nepal, before the political changes in 1951, there were no provisions for the establishment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA). Also, Nepal's foreign relations were very limited. But the newly introduced democratic system brought a different foreign policy outlook. During the Panchayat era, Nepal's foreign relations and international engagements increased, and Nepal adopted different foreign policies to adapt itself to the international order at that time. After the end of the Cold War, the world went through tremendous globalisation and economic liberalisation. The power relationships, the world system and strategic rivalry among the states changed. Issues such as migration, climate change, resource scarcity, transnational terrorism and nuclear proliferation took prominence. In the same period, Nepal also went through the changes (Stares, Jia, Tocci, Jaishankar, & Kortunov, 2020). After 1990, and particularly after the declaration of multi-party democracy in Nepal, the Nepali economy also got liberalised. The Maoist movement flagged the way to uplift the marginalised people's voices and reinforce the social movement for change during the period 1996-2006, which also affected the development of the state, and people migrated to other countries for work and settlement (Hamal, 2002). In 2015, the Constitution of Nepal was promulgated with the principles of republicanism, federalism, secularism and inclusiveness. In this context, China's rise and India as an emerging economy in Asia enhanced the geopolitical importance of Nepal more than ever. Thus, this phase can be characterised by growing geopolitical and geo-economic competition with increased developmental assistance and strategic partnerships.

Moreover, the increased engagement of external actors and the changed scenario in Nepal also led different government authorities other than MoFA to involve themselves in external relations. Not only MoFA, other government authorities like the Ministry of Finance, National Planning Commission, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Nepal Tourism Board and others have engaged

actively with foreign actors (Adhikari, 2015). This growing multidimensional engagement in Nepal correspondingly led to structural scarcity to deal with these changing circumstances and an absence of coordination among the existing institutions. It has been reported time and again that the “Economic Cooperation Coordination Division” under the Ministry of Finance, for instance, negotiates and signs agreements with foreign governments without thorough consultation with MoFA, at times, resulting in controversies. The National Security Council Secretariat could be referred more regularly on matters relating to national security and dealings with specific countries. The Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation along with the Nepal Tourism Board, the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, Ministry of Home and Ministry of Defense are key ministries that see a steady flow of dealings with foreign countries and embassies based in Kathmandu.

Provinces have lately emerged as other important components of our overall foreign policy discussion. The Constitution of Nepal has provided for the mobilisation of foreign aid and grants with the consent from the centre under the jurisdiction of the provinces (Constitution of Nepal, 2015), which makes them new actors in foreign development aid politics. The significant involvement of different ministries as well as local level bodies means more cumbersome foreign policy decision-making in the years ahead. Therefore, there is a need to see the whole gamut of our international relations exercise in its entirety. All in all, “foreign policy is made in the name of the state, but it is the government which formulates and executes it. The government is not an inanimate body. It is a synthesis of organisations and individuals having their organisational and personal interests which are not necessarily similar” (Malhotra, 1993, p. 199). Therefore, when one talks about foreign policy decision-making, it is essential to take into consideration the new actors and factors in shaping Nepal’s foreign relations.

### **International Practices**

Amid the complex web of structural interdependencies in foreign policy decision-making and practices, a question is posed: what are the key actors and factors that influence decision-making on issues related to security and foreign policy, and which institution ensures that all branches of the state abide by the constitutional provisions on foreign policy matters? These issues are perpetually debated in the parliamentary committees, media and among public intellectuals.

While it is up to the government to select the foreign policy experts to advise the prime minister and the foreign minister on issues related to foreign affairs,

the institutional arrangement of the government needs to be fortified in such a way that the basic contours of foreign policy are always adhered to. The institutional advice to the head of the government must always be paramount as this is what has been practised in other countries, including neighbouring India, which also adopts a parliamentary system of democracy. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in India overrides decisions on foreign policy to such an extent that foreign visits of even powerful chief ministers of big states have been cancelled due to failure in receiving concurrence from the MEA (Dutta, 2001). Although the Nepal government has framed a regulation for all top leaders of the country to inform MoFA before meeting any foreign dignitary, unfortunately, as reported, it is flouted by the same people that brought the regulation to implementation.

Another crucial body that has come to play a pivotal role in shaping Nepal's foreign relations is the Parliamentary Committee on International Relations. Comprising members of the parliament, this committee often directs the government on crucial foreign policy cruxes, such as on border issues but at times thwarting foreign film festivals. The legislature's vital position on foreign affairs was also realised by the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal-1990, which mandated a two-thirds majority for any treaty signed with a foreign nation (Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal, 1990). The current constitution also mandates a parliamentary hearing of ambassadors before they are officially appointed by the head of state, a feature not practised in established democracies like India and the UK.

With all these actors ranging from the Ministry of Finance to the legislature, there is undoubtedly a clamouring need for weekly coordination meetings among the stakeholders and especially between the ministries of Foreign, Finance, Defense, Home and Labour on foreign policy issues. Weekly National Security Council meetings need to be presided over by the head of the government or a senior deputy prime minister as well, information collated and carefully analysed, and feedback given to MoFA for processing. The significant involvement of so many ministries as well as state and local governments has meant more complicated foreign policy decision-making.

### **Emerging India and Rising China: Way Forward for Nepal**

Notwithstanding the incumbent deficiencies, we need to comprehend the fact that the exercise of Nepal's international relations is fairly old in comparison to other South Asian states. Nepal established diplomatic relations with the UK before India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. The bedrock of any foreign policy is to serve national interest, and those interests

are outlined in the constitution of the day. Most of the salient tenets of Nepal's foreign policy have remained unchanged despite change in regimes, constitutions and governments. But some critical issues seek urgent attention from policymakers and practitioners since the operating environment has changed drastically for our country. We have to answer crucial questions such as: What is our place in the world today? What is our place in the South Asian region? How are we perceived by the international community?

We see the world changing rapidly and with it the global power dynamics. Nepal needs to carefully gauge and analyse the repercussions of this changing world order. Experts have been predicting lately that the rise of India and China will eventually lead to an Asian century. Since the 90s, Asia's gross domestic product has more than tripled, China's GDP has even grown nine-fold. This boom has lifted millions out of poverty and enabled them to join the middle class (Heinl, 2018, p. 110). By 2050, the Chinese economy could be almost 50 per cent larger than its US counterpart, while the Indian economy may follow in the footsteps and surpass America a few years later. Nepal needs to equip its missions in India and China, and the consulates in Lhasa and Kolkata, with the necessary manpower, budget and mandate to match this trend so that we can reap benefits from an emerging India and rising China. Universities in these countries need to have Nepal Study Centres (Times of India, 2012). There are currently no Nepal Study Centres in India solely devoted to the study and research on Nepal. The sole centre at Benaras Hindu University (BHU) has now changed its name to 'Nepal and Japan Study Centre'. A collaborative trilateral initiative at the level of think tanks can also be launched by the Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA). There used to be an 'India Chair' at Tribhuvan University till a few years back but has been discontinued now. A 'Nepal Chair' needs to be established at a prominent Indian and Chinese university. Fostering contacts between academic institutions and think tanks is crucial for building trust and understanding.

There is no doubt that regional cooperative endeavours, whether at the level of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), will follow the shift in the global balance of power (Heinl, 2018). As a country located between these two Asian giants, the role of Nepal is instrumental in creating an atmosphere of harmony, peace and cooperation. But the truncated nature of politics in Nepal with typical power asymmetry between Nepal-India and Nepal-China is reinforced by the

conundrum that if we build strong relations with China, it adversely impacts Indo-Nepal relations and vice versa. Every regime in Kathmandu ever since the unification of the country has had to endure this challenge (KC & Bhattarai, 2018). “The current transition in Asia is rooted in the gains states have made by actively engaging in cooperation. Cooperative security is not a theory in international relations. It is a process born out of the need to change the domestic and external strategies of states in a new international environment. To sustain the process, Asian states, however, would need to transform what has so far been an ad hoc process into concrete institutions” (Dutta, 2001, p. 347).

The optimum level of equilibrium for us, therefore, is a scenario in which Indo-Nepal and Sino-Nepal synergy is best utilised in terms of economic benefit for Nepal in terms of trade, tourism, transit, investment and connectivity. This should happen without impinging on our conduct of an independent foreign policy. The traditional notion of “a yam between two boulders” has metamorphosed into a “transit state” or Nepal emerging as “a vibrant bridge” between two Asian giants (KC & Bhattarai, 2018). In essence, all notions are the same. If trilateral relationship and collaboration between Japan, China and India working together to the advantage of infrastructure opportunities is a possibility, why not trilateral cooperation between China, India and Nepal? (Chaudhary, 2014)

For such a fruitful cooperative endeavour to emerge in the South Asian landscape there needs to be coherence in foreign policy behaviour and a broad understanding between India and China in their policies towards Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives -- the small states in South Asia. The Wuhan and Mamallapuram Summits between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi signalled that their strategic communication has gotten stronger and deeper. Nepal needs to take these new realities into account and study carefully how we can reap benefits from increasing friendliness between our two giant neighbours.

Nepal is currently the Chair of SAARC. It's our singular duty to ensure SAARC meetings are held regularly, and the decisions of the 18<sup>th</sup> Summit are implemented without hesitation. Member states have come to realise that there is no alternative to SAARC as validated by the teleconferencing during the COVID-19 pandemic among heads of governments of South Asia. Sooner or later, the 19<sup>th</sup> Summit will be held, but the larger malaise affecting the SAARC process is Indo-Pak rivalry. A weak and powerless Secretariat, lack of sufficient political will, cumbersome decision-making process, provision of

unanimity among all members and a non-committal culture of the bureaucracy when Summits are not held on time shouldn't further paralyse the regional entity. As the largest economy in the region, India has a disproportionate responsibility to ensure that this regional project succeeds. As the largest country in the region, its choices and actions will condition the policies of its neighbours and of non-aligned powers that have a stake in the sub-continent (Bajpai, 2013, p. 83). On our part, MoFA of Nepal must act as a guardian of the SAARC Secretariat and the Nepali foreign minister and the foreign secretary must regularly inspect the Secretariat because other member states are not in a position to do so.

### **Structural Reform and Policy Coordination**

Since the international landscape has changed, so should the world of a Nepali diplomat. This calls for major adjustments inside MoFA. Apart from the internal meetings, there must also be a regular system of consultation among the major political party leaders on foreign policy issues and between the foreign minister and foreign policy experts. These meetings may or may not be publicised. Currently, we see that only during high-level visits to and from the country are such meetings held (Rana & Chatterjee, 2011).

However, we must also comprehend the fact that the government cannot re-energise our international relations exercise amidst the glaring challenges that confront us both internationally and regionally without adequate human resources and sufficient budget. On both these counts, MoFA is dependent on the other arms of the government. It is here that serious intervention is needed by the head of the government (Dahal, Sainju, Lohani, Sharma, & Parajuli, 2008).

Officials, both gazetted and non-gazetted, are on the front line of MoFA in executing the policies of the Nepal government. They must stay at least three years in the ministry in Kathmandu before being posted outside. This is important. Their in-service training and operating manuals must be accustomed to the changing times. When MoFA sends its officials abroad, more often than they have been assigned to serve different divisions inside the ministry, it creates a skewed organisational structure that breeds inefficiency. In today's age of information revolution, there must be a significant number of staff in the Division to collate and analyse all the information that is coming in from the various missions abroad. Coordination among the line ministries and between MoFA and its missions has always been a major challenge in our context. It can be corrected by conducting regular virtual meetings from within MoFA. Use of new technology will also help reduce unnecessary costs.

While the approximate ratio of political appointees and career ambassadors has now been a set practice, we could have a selection committee to be set up by the cabinet for the appointment of ambassadors similar to committees

it sets up to appoint the vice-chancellors of various universities and lately the governor of Nepal Rastra Bank. The foreign minister can be the chair of this committee, with the selection done from within a roster developed by the committee, which must be made public.

Another essential element of the restructuring project is the setting up of a “Public Diplomacy Division” inside MoFA headed by a senior joint secretary and support staff. It can also be the same joint secretary who is the spokesperson. Several factors have necessitated the establishment of this new division. Firstly, the increasing influence of non-state actors, pressure of NGOs, regular conference reports brought out by various national and international think tanks and the role played by the media have compelled the adoption of a new mindset on the part of the executioners. There is nowadays massive “domestication” of foreign policy. Nepali migrant labour directly complains to the foreign minister or foreign secretary via social media regarding passport and consular matters; tourists bluntly notify about various difficulties being faced at the embassies; investors urgently require information on pending paperwork; TV channels at times telecast live from the border on encroachment, etc. (Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, 2020). Without proper verification, people resort to trolls and comments. A few days later, a small rumour turns into a big political controversy, impacting bilateral relations. States have always tended to evolve the right mix of strategies to deal with different elements of internal politics in other countries that impact them.

Foreign embassies in Kathmandu have long used editorials, newspaper articles and radio programmes as well as visits of journalists to promote their own countries and build a positive image in Nepal. It is high time we also used public diplomacy abroad to try and influence public opinion about our country. With the cooperation of the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) and Investment Board of Nepal, this Public Diplomacy Division will invite foreign journalists and columnists to promote Nepal and inform/influence the international audience (Dahal, 2018). Since a coherent foreign policy can flow from clearly defined objectives on the domestic front, it is to promote the inherent strengths of a country that a government should follow a certain policy in the external sphere. Therefore, the outreach and dissemination exercise should not only be seen as a PR initiative of the government but more so as an imperative of the changing times in which public perception matters. The planned “Sagarmatha Sambahad” (now postponed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic), therefore, is another illustration of the outreach that we would like to accomplish to put our views across to a wider international community. We should not forget that the core of the concept of foreign policy [has become] an instrument in the hands of the national states to change the behaviour of other states to their advantage. Ensuring cyber security is a major concern of all countries in the contemporary world. This issue has

turned out to be another difficulty for all governments around the world. Not so long ago, many countries did not even hold national views on cyber security questions. It means the current and future discussions on international security cyber issues will become more complex and require more time (Heinl, 2018). MoFA, and for that matter, all organs of the Nepal Government must ensure that its communication with missions abroad and within itself is safe and secure. Cyber security is not only the protection of office computers, including hardware, software and data, from cyber attacks but also protecting and making secure the mobile phones and mobile applications of Nepali diplomats and their families. The goal of cyber security is to limit the risks and protect IT assets from the attackers with malicious intent. A separate section can be dedicated as an IT cell devoted to cyber security.

### **Conclusion**

Foreign policy is an instrument for promoting national interest and policy by a state while dealing with the international community. Modern foreign policy and diplomacy are presently experiencing fundamental changes at an unprecedented rate, which have ultimately affected the traditional way of diplomacy and decision-making. These changes are induced by the changes in global politics and international world order. Along with these changes, the actors involved in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy and diplomacy have increased. Not only non-state actors, actors within the state authority have also surged up with a growth in the number of foreign and diplomatic engagements. Owing to the same understanding, this study has found that such changes have perceptively impacted foreign policy decision-making. Other than MoFA, other line ministries and government agencies have become a part of international engagements, making them a prominent stakeholder in foreign policy and diplomacy.

These changes pose several challenges to Nepal's foreign policy behaviour. One of the most prominent challenges is the lack of coordination among the actors involved along with the need for structural and institutional changes. Not only have the actors in international relations changed, but also the nature of international cooperation. Most importantly, the geopolitical and geo-economics interests of Nepal have increased with the rise of India and India. Consequently, these challenges and circumstances urge the policymakers to instantaneously induce policy coordination and structural changes to meet the challenges in the future. Therefore, assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the existing system, analysing the contemporary international political system and also gauging the structural capacity of other states, Nepal can drive a robust foreign policy with a strong institution and institutional collaboration.

Among them, policy coordination among the line ministries, structural reforms in MoFA, augmentation of the skills of human resources and the use of information and communication technologies are essential for charting a new direction and strategy for Nepal's foreign relations and diplomacy.

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# UNLEASHING NEPAL'S DEMOGRAPHY AS SOFT POWER

■ **Sujeev Shakya**

## **Abstract**

*For small powers like Nepal, enhancement of soft power to achieve national interests and economic aspirations is important. For this, however, the aspect of Nepal's demography has not been considered as a source for advancing Nepal's soft power. Owing to the same research gap, this study emphasises how Nepal's demographics can be a significant facet to enhancing Nepal's soft power. With the same objective, this paper has essentially explored the unexplored territories of demography, migration and also women's contributions to Nepal's economy to boost up Nepal's soft power ambition. Stressing on the changed narrative away from the conventional notion of "yam between two boulders", the study introduces the idea of "Global Nepali" as a component to enhance Nepal's soft power, considering the changing demography of Nepal. Also, by shedding light on the contribution of Nepali women in Nepal's economic growth and its potentiality to advance Nepal's soft power, this study reiterates that the soft power of a country like Nepal lies in the hearts of its people and what they have to offer to the world.*

**Keywords:** *Nepal, Nepali, Soft Power, Demography, Women, Small Power*

## **Introduction**

Till the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the power of a nation was associated only with its military capabilities and material resources, or the hard power. But along with the process of globalisation and industrialisation, the notion of power changed, with more emphasis on soft power (Digester, 1992). Soft power has been referred to as a component of national power, presently based on ideational and cultural attractiveness, which is intentionally or unintentionally utilised by actors in international relations to achieve strategic imperatives (Culligan, Dubber & Lotten, 2014). Likewise, soft power establishes more than ordinary cultural power, rather it incorporates the political values and ideas, socioeconomic and educational systems, and authentic national strategies as acknowledged by other nations and people. Theoretically, the importance and relevance of soft power has increased (Fan, 2008).

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The term “soft power” was first coined by Joseph Nye in the 1980s as “the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion” using the nation’s “intangible power resources such as culture, ideology and institutions” (Nye, 1990). For Nye, soft power is an instrument to create, harmonise and co-exist (Nye, 2008). After many decades of the first introduction of the term, soft power has now gone on to become, arguably, one of the most largely invoked terms in foreign policy debates all around the world.

As a concept, soft power has experienced certain modifications since it was created. Soft power can be understood with two notions of soft, both with a narrow difference in the understandings. First is the one that Nye defined previously, soft power as the power of attractiveness, and an ability to “get others to want what you want” through your good repute and affirmative appearance (Trunkos, 2013). Nevertheless, his newest explanation of soft power presents the idea in much wider terms, as “the capacity to affect others to acquire favoured results by the co-optive means of outlining the schema, persuasion, and progressive magnetism” (Nye, 2009).

But, critics claim that governments are incapable of entirely regulating soft power or envisage its efficacy due to limited idiosyncrasies in each recipient state. Nor does it seem possible to measure and quantify it (USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 2019). Concurrently, the internet, communication and technology changed the definition of soft power, as a result of which Korean music and dramas took over the internet, Instagram posts started to decide which country is the best tourism destination, reviews on platforms like Trip Advisor determined how safe a country is and videos posted on YouTube influenced people’s eating and travelling habits as well as their leisure and entertainment habits (Anshan, 2008).

While much of the soft power debate is concerned with the future narratives of the dimensions of soft power and global order, the capacity to have an impact on its imminent course is beyond the means of all but a handful of large and powerful states (Stokke, 2010). However, this does not imply that middle-sized and small powers do not have any significant part to play. Without a doubt, with clarity of purpose and the right capabilities, soft power offers small powers an instrument to attain tangible impressions on the global stage and future of soft power diplomacy. For small states wanting to make a positive impact on the world stage, soft power offers the best means to do so. Small states can best do this by focussing on how they can contribute to securing their national interests (Ulrichsen, 2016).

However, Nepali soft power is in a quagmire of dichotomy. As a country situated in between two of Asia's largest and most powerful states, China and India, the model and conduct of soft power are remarkably poor in Nepal (Karki & Dhungana, 2020). On the one hand, Nepal is blessed with the best of the Himalayan range, culture and religion and, thus, enjoys a brand image as a country of great nature and nice, welcoming and brave people across the world. However, on the other hand, Nepalis themselves suffer from very low self-esteem about their country's power capability, which is believed to have been generated by the very narrative of being a yam between two boulders (Aditya, 1998). Having been geographically hemmed in-between the world's second-largest economy-China, and the world's fastest-growing economy-India, Nepal views its position as something bestowed by geography and history and, thus, projects an image of dependency (Karki, 2020). The narrative of representing Nepal as a small power, while also providing an impression that the country will find it hard to coexist with its fast-growing neighbours, is not new.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, King Prithvi Narayan Shah, the founder of modern Nepal, had described Nepal as "a yam between two boulders" in terms of its distinct geographical position as well as the geopolitical situation, location and size of the country concerning its two giant neighbours (Baral, 2018). Since the emergence of modern Nepal with that narrative, Nepal has been represented and described as a dependent country. Further adding to the narrative, Shah also suggested that Nepal should be cautious with the South and maintain a close friendship with the North (Baral, 2020). In the Divya Upadesh, Prithvi Narayan Shah had counselled maintaining a treaty of friendship with the emperor of China while emphasising the significance of a treaty of friendship with the British East India Company (Khanal, 2019).

Later, when the Rana period began in Nepal after Jung Bahadur Rana wielded absolute power, Nepal established a new direction in its foreign policy. It was the foreign policy of isolation coupled with ignoring China, as it was seen as a declining power, thus, strengthening the relationship with the British. Nepal started viewing international affairs through British-centric lenses (Baral, 2018). In the years after this, when democracy got established in Nepal, the country's foreign policy was more of a "special relations" with India. In these periods, Nepal never took the issue of soft power seriously.

Besides this, the leading thinkers in society, the political leaders who represent the country and historians, who have the opportunity to articulate narratives that are later taught as history, continued to portray Nepal as a small power

with very little prospects due to its landlocked nature and geography as its destiny (Aditya, 1998). Neither have the leaders, who have had the chance to change the narrative, communicated so, nor have the people who live with the same narrative challenged it. The dependency that has been stressed upon throughout history has been perceived as a lesson that a sustained economic expansion will not entirely benefit Nepal, as there will always be interference from its neighbours (Pandey, 2011).

Despite being a multifold size of the district of Darjeeling in India, the Indian State of Sikkim or the country Bhutan, Nepal continued to compare itself with these places. Even today, Nepal, with a population of 30 million, continues to compare itself with Darjeeling with 2 million people, Sikkim with less than half a million people and Bhutan with 800 thousand people (Dahal, 2018). We have never tried to examine what makes Nepal and Nepalis think that they are small.

Even though soft power as a concept is progressively being incorporated into policy-making and diplomatic efforts, and although soft power provides small powers with an opportunity to attract other actors to emulate their position and inspire them to take collective action, previous researches have not incorporated or have been lingering on the debate to conceptualise soft power as a foreign policy tool. Moreover, Nepal's soft power practices in real world politics have been minimal, and the study to enhance this opportunity in the globe for Nepal has been marginal. Specifically, the study of Nepal's demography as a potential soft power tool has been insignificant. Thus, the objective of the study is to establish the changed narrative of Nepal other than the yam metaphor, explore the changing demographics of Nepal and project Nepalis, especially women, as the source of soft power.

### **Methodology**

The research design of the paper is qualitative with the inclusion of data from secondary sources. The data in the study have been collected from government publications and independent research organisations. The data thus have been studied and analysed for the results of the study, primarily by an inductive process of organising data into categories and identifying the pattern among the categories to complete the research objectives. Academic journals, books and magazines related to soft power and small powers have been taken into consideration to critically analyse the research gaps and complete the objectives of the research.

## **Results:**

### **Rethinking the Narrative for Nepal**

The metaphors of “yam”, “buffer” and “bridge” are the various interpretations made at different periods about the geostrategic location of Nepal. Many believe that Nepal’s landlockedness has turned itself into a hostage, limiting its economic, political and diplomatic outreach (KC & Bhattarai, 2018). Given how Nepal has been presented in today’s growing world, rethinking the yam mindset is essential for Nepal to be able to engage more with its neighbours economically. We also need to look back at history where India and China dominated the global economy until the 17<sup>th</sup> century-before the British and European dominance across the world. The GDP of India and China accounted for as much as 55% of the world total at the end of this period (Abdullahi & Phiri, 2019). At the same time, during the Malla period in Nepali history, the Kathmandu Valley, adjacent areas and trade points along the border were all very well developed. The three cities of the valley were rich with excellent infrastructure; they excelled in Buddhist, Hindu and other learnings as well as in artisanship, crafts and engineering (Dahal P., 1986). This suggested that Nepal was not much behind the glory and achievement that the two boulders were enjoying. Now, with China and India estimated to control 40% of the global economy by 2040 (PWC, 2019), Nepal needs to explore its prosperity between these two countries. In today’s interdependent world, countries across the globe are connected by their diverse social and political relationships rather than those of security and military power. For Nepal to catch up with its neighbours and for all three of the states to emerge as extraordinary powers of Asia, connectivity has to be initiated and intensified (KC & Bhattarai, 2018).

The conventional “India-locked” identity of Nepal has been ceded with a transit and transportation agreement with China in 2016 (ibid). Now, Nepal’s land-linked status has brought a change in the political, economic and diplomatic context. Through this geostrategic location, Nepal can foster its prosperity through transit diplomacy or trilateral cooperation between India, China and Nepal. In the increasing context of interactions in the area of culture, trade, tourism, investment, security and politics, the potentiality to promote Nepal’s soft power diplomacy has synergised the geostrategic location of Nepal (Kumar, 2017). Hence, Nepal should go beyond its conventional mentality of being ‘landlocked’ and use its geostrategic location in promoting promote soft power to accrue maximum benefits, not only economically but also politically and diplomatically.

### **Changing Demographics: Potential Soft Power Mechanism for the Future**

It is time to look at Nepal through a new lens as a country which has undergone demographic changes in the past three decades. Nepal has experienced very rapid demographic vicissitudes in the past few decades, resulting from a high fertility-high mortality society to a low-fertility-low mortality society within a comparatively short time. This conversion is a tremendously affirmative result of the state's development (National Planning Commission, 2017). Nepal is experiencing the "demographic window of opportunity" where the section of the working-age population is predominantly prominent. States like the "Asian Tigers" formulated and executed the right policies and required investments and were able to successfully take benefit of this opportunity and secure their demographic dividends in the form of enhanced human development and economic growth (Chalise, 2018). Thus, Nepal should also capitalise on this prospect and use this tremendous human resource as an instrument to enhance Nepal's soft power in various ways.

According to Nepal's National Youth Policy, approximately 20.8% of the total population of the country falls in the age group 16-25 years and 40.68% in the age group 16-40 years (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2015). This indicates that youths constitute the largest segment of the population, providing Nepal with a unique opportunity to take advantage of its population dividend. Moreover, a Nepali woman gives birth to an average of 2.3 children in comparison to 6.3 in 1976 (Ministry of Health, 2016). The comparison of the population pyramid of Nepal (1997-2017) shows that new cohorts in recent years are shrinking, suggesting that Nepal is in a demographic transition. Additionally, the population pyramid also shows that there is a decline in the population aged less than 10 years of age, again indicating that Nepal is experiencing a shift (Chalise, 2018). The examination of Nepal's demographic statistics over the last several decades shows that Nepal has not only experienced the beginning of its demographic changeover but has also been experiencing rapid demographic change, resulting in positive socioeconomic developments (National Planning Commission, 2017).

However, when talking about demographics, the emigration of the youth in search of labour began from the beginning of the very demographic window of opportunity. Although Nepali youths have been making significant contributions to the country's economic growth, the increasing poverty, political instability and lack of a right policy environment have, unfortunately, pushed the dividend to become a demographic burden (Bossavie & Denisova,

2018). This is why the large diaspora of Nepalis in different parts of the world, as well as the ones present here, has to be capitalised as a device for enhancing Nepal's soft power. Projections of Nepal's population suggest that it will remain a relatively young country for several years into the future (UNFPA Nepal, 2017). Thus, it is imperative to reap the benefits of the finite demographic dividend within the "demographic window of opportunity" for advancing Nepal's soft power diplomacy.

### **The Global Nepali: A Concept for Nepal's Soft Power**

The concept of migration in Nepal has existed throughout history with people travelling to faraway lands in search of economic opportunities or to escape wars and natural calamities or to get away from social problems (Bruslé, 2010). For a long time, migration has been associated with hardships, challenges and separation from family, and, simply, as a curse. However, there has been an increased dependence on migration that is bringing in the much-needed money to the country (Kunwar, 2015). Therefore, in the context of understanding the Nepali diaspora and its migration, it is imperative to shift the narrative to exploring migration as a soft power tool and unleashing its potential.

The first batch of migrants that went out of the Kathmandu Valley would perhaps be the one that left with Princess Bhrikuti in the 7th century. Thereafter, in the 12th century, Arniko triggered the culture of migrating for work and later for business (Prasad, 2015). With Tibetan Buddhism flourishing, craftsmen from Nepal found work building monasteries and furthering their craft in the Himalayan kingdoms. Migration has, thus, always flourished in Nepal (Kunwar, 2015). However, the formal movement of Nepalis to different parts of the globe started from 1814-1816 after the end of the Anglo-Nepal War, after which a total of 4,650 Nepali youths were recruited into the British armed forces (Kunwar, 2015).

Likewise, the migration of Nepalis for employment, to work in the tea estates of Darjeeling and the forests of Assam, India, began in the second half of the 19th century. International labour migration, basically to the Gulf States, Malaysia and other Southeast Asian states, is a relatively new form of migration in the Nepali milieu with about a 30-year history (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2014).

Nonetheless, no matter what the reason for migration, the perception of migration being bad perhaps stems from the fact that it is about leaving one's nation. Along with this, the government's inability to create employment opportunities in Nepal is also a key factor for labour migration. Moreover, the open and porous border which it shares with its southern neighbour, India, has allowed steady stream of Nepali workers to India for work (Prasad, 2015).

Given the similarities in language, culture and tradition, India is a preferred destination for Nepali workers. A substantial number of workers going overseas for work through irregular channels travel to India as it do not necessitate labour approval (Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, 2020).

The Foreign Employment Information Management System (FEIMS) reports that till fiscal 2018/19, Nepalis have travelled to 132 countries for work and business. In addition to this, in the Gulf region alone, as per 2017/18 records, there are about 400,000 Nepalis in Saudi Arabia, 400,000 in Qatar, 200,000 in the UAE, 70,000 in Kuwait, 25,000 in Bahrain and 20,000 in Oman (Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, 2020). Labourers apart, there are prominent Nepali doctors in Australia, successful designers and models in the US and businessmen in many parts of the world. Such international labour migration has become widely accepted for Nepal's economic growth. The Nepali diaspora spread in various parts of the world is beginning to offer strong support for the rise of Nepali soft power (Shrestha, 2017).

Apart from workers travelling in search of job opportunities, Gurkha soldiers and Nepali Army peacekeepers have made a name for themselves at home and abroad with their khukuris, a utility knife that has become a symbol of bravery (Dahal R. K., 2018). As Nepal entered the modern era in the 1950s, the legendary success of the Gurkhas in foreign armies was already well known. The Nepali economy had defined its comparative advantage and its primary export: it's loyal, trustworthy and brave youth. Considering this, in Nepal's context, the positive image of the Gurkhas, peacekeepers and cheerful workers serving in the service industry around the world has to be given broader coverage (Suhrke, 2011).

Apart from this, there has always been a tradition of learning from other countries. Today, Nepali students make up the third largest foreign student community in Australia. In the United States, Nepali students are among the top ten enrollees (Ghimire, 2019). In the same vein, multiple foreign institutions have links with institutions in Nepal, providing a range of world-class degrees. The integration of this dimension can be used as a tool for promoting Nepali soft power. As Joseph Nye puts it, education and collaboration with prestigious foreign institutions can be a tool of soft power in creating national goodwill, image, appeal and attraction among foreign students (Fan, 2008).

Thus, the large diaspora of global Nepalis can be used as a soft power instrument and as an aspect of global diplomacy.

### **Women in Nepal's Economic Growth**

As we have seen, numerous factors contribute to Nepal's soft power. While the demographic dividend described above is one part, the other is the emergence of women in politics, the administration and economy. Since the early 1980s, Nepal has made specific policy declarations to integrate women in development (Asian Development Bank, 2016). Although women's access to political and administrative decision-making positions were minimal in the early decades (i.e., less than 10% and 5% respectively) due to reasons such as lack of access to education and economic resources, social expectations for household responsibilities and restricted mobility (Asian Development Bank, 1999), the situation has been witnessing gradual changes. While there are instances of inequalities that persist in the economy, progressive laws have also been introduced.

One such instance of progress in the political arena is the 1996 Ordinance on Local Elections, which required all contesting parties in the election to have at least one woman candidate among the five ward member contestants. The provisions of the law have been seen as a progressive move (Acharya, 2017). In 2017, the Local Level Election Act required that for every five candidates, two must be women. As a result, 20,000 Nepali women were standing for the election in the first two phases out of the 50,000 candidates campaigning to lead 283 regions (Samjhauta Nepal, 2018). This mandate suggests how the country has started doing things differently after decades of turmoil, patriarchy and monarchy.

Providing a chance for women to be representatives and have the decision-making power can empower them and contribute accordingly (Acharya R. C., 2020). For instance, in rural Nepal, it is believed that running a shop means making sales in person to deliver products, which often requires talking to men. That is why few women take up business. However, with laws that provide women with a chance to become local representatives, women, even in rural Nepal, now have access to a platform to prove their worth. Bringing inclusive and socially conscientious changes lays the foundation for women to be able to contribute to the nation and its progress. With increasing opportunities for women-most of all bottom-up inclusiveness-Nepal has been experiencing monumental changes, and this has also allowed Nepal to maintain its economic growth (Mawby & Applebaum, 2018).

In the earlier decades, when social customs restricted women's role to the household, women were mostly involved in home-based industries, such as food processing, garments, hosiery and handicrafts. But with the gradual

decline of these industries due to competition from imported products, the result was the displacement of traditional crafts by industrial-scale production, which meant the replacement of female workers by male labourers (Acharya R. C., 2020). Today, with the change in the demographic dividend coupled with an increased working-age population, there are more working women in the country. The population of working-age males stands at 9.2 million while that of females is 11.53 million. According to the Nepal Labour Force Survey 2017/18, for every 100 working-age males, there are 125 females. Additionally, for every 100 employed males, there are 59 employed females (Government of Nepal, 2019).

Although these numbers suggest a significant change, women still struggle to find an appropriate environment to work in the formal sector because of their social responsibilities at home. Only 22.5% of the working-age women are employed in the formal sector while the informal sector comprises 66.5% of women (WOFOWON and GAATW, 2019). In the informal sector, women face wage gaps, lack of social security, lack of exposure and training as well as a “family penalty” for not working during motherhood. The wage decisions by most enterprises depend on how much time the workers can contribute, and as women still have to undertake most of the household work, they become subject to lower wages, resulting in wage gaps (Acharya R. C., 2020).

### **Economic Index to Capture Women’s Contribution**

There is a need to work on the fundamentals of how the transition can be furthered to move towards the development of an economic index. As termed by Arlie Hochschild in 1989, women in our world face a double shift. The “first shift” is the remuneration in terms of wages and salaries that workers receive. As for the second shift, it entails grossly underpaid and undervalued work. While women perform their jobs and complete their first shift, they still have to go through the second shift, which are the domestic duties and daily household chores faced by working women (Gorp, 2013). Among many others, Hochschild’s findings suggest that, on average, working women spend three hours a day on housework while men spend an average of 17 minutes a day, and that women work roughly 15 hours longer per week than men (Blair-Loy, Hochschild, Pugh, Williams, & Hartmann, 2015). Thus, in the preface of the book *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home*, the author, Arlie Hochschild, talks about the adjustments to rapid transitions those impact women’s lives in combining both work and family life (Gorp, 2013). And this holds for what the working women in Nepal face also, because the second shift and the struggles of experiencing it in various forms exist for all working women.

While progressive laws in different areas in Nepal have guaranteed significant improvements for women, Nepali women still struggle to advance their professions. As there is a serious dearth of focus on rewarding the unpaid care work that women perform, it is imperative to closely examine what exists to develop a measurable method to address it and to also look at ways to empower women. The soft power in terms of women's roles and responsibilities can then be appreciated and rewarded.

Taking reference from how Bhutan has been measuring its Gross National Happiness (GNH) after declaring in 1972 that "Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross Domestic Product" and also giving importance to sustainable development as well as non-economic aspects of well-being (Tideman, 2013), the same can be done by Nepal with regard to "women soft power". The idea of GNH has influenced Bhutan's economic as well as social policy and has also allowed Bhutan to be able to position itself as a global thought leader in this matter (Brooks, 2013). Similarly, the role of women as well as the growing changes with regard to women's roles and responsibilities should be placed at the heart of Nepal's peace-building and state-building agenda. Nepal can begin counting women's roles and responsibilities as a part of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and output computation.

According to a report published by ActionAid in 2016, for every hour spent by Nepali men on unpaid care, women spend 1.4 hours (ActionAid Nepal, 2017). Feminist economists like Gayle Rubin have successfully established that the actual profit is extracted from the unpaid household work, most of which is undertaken by women all around the world (Berik, Rodgers & Seguino, 2009). It is not a point of contention for many economists that unpaid household work or reproductive work is still not calculated in the GDP. This could be a great opportunity for Nepal as surveys show that Nepal's GDP would nearly double if reproductive work is included in the GDP. According to a 2008 survey, it is estimated that if reproductive work were assigned a monetary value, it could contribute to about 91.3% of the country's GDP (Resource Centre for Primary Health Care (RECPHEC) and Health Bridge, 2008). Calculating reproductive work in this GDP index can be an opportunity for Nepal to not just amend its poor gender equity index and hit the right notes on strengthening soft power, but also to climb higher on the rank of prosperous nations.

### **Wielding Soft Power for Nepal**

While Nepal is branded and promoted in the international arena as a country of Mount Everest and the birth country of Lord Buddha, it has not done justice to Nepal's true potential and changing dimensions. Nepal has much to offer the

world besides this prowess. Presently, Nepal's Peacekeeping Forces in several parts of the world have contributed to the national image and enhanced the soft power as well (Baral, 2020). A new kind of branding is required for Nepal to truly live up to its soft power potential. The promotion and branding of Nepal as a country and Nepalis as its people should be based on humanity, outright friendliness and hospitality. The local Nepali touch and the smile that the Nepalis wear can become Nepal's goodwill. The promising faces of the Nepali youth can be the next step for Nepal in leveraging both its economic and social status.

The soft power of a country like Nepal lies in the hearts of its people and what they have to offer. Given the country's strong demographics where 64.65% of the people are between 15-64 years of age and 94.22% are under 64 years of age, coupled with an environment fit for the growth of women and the large Nepali diaspora, Nepal can reach many new heights using the demographic component to enhance the soft power of the country. The way Nepal utilises its soft power is an essential and immediately required ingredient for its engagement with the world. It is the right time for Nepal to unleash its soft power through demographic means.

### **Conclusion**

Soft power is the co-optive capacity of a state to persuade other states and people through strong appeal to achieve the national interest. Unlike hard power, soft power uses the methods of attractiveness and persuasion. However, the applicability of soft power and its inclusion in the state's foreign policy is minimal. For small powers like Nepal, it is an important tool to further the national image and achieve national interest goals. But, Nepal's narrative as a "yam" destined by geography had put previous policymakers into the swamp of indecisiveness to examine other models of foreign policy choices.

Rather than following the narrative that Nepal has become a hostage to its landlockedness, Nepal should rethink the narrative. While examining such a notion for Nepal, enhancement of soft power is important. One of the unexplored areas of Nepal's soft power is Nepal's demographic dividend. The changing demographics have created a "demographic window of opportunity" for Nepal to further its development plans and economic growth. Benefitting from a huge working age population, Nepal can achieve rapid economic growth and enhance soft power capabilities. Moreover, this demographic dividend has a huge potential for advancing the country's soft power.

Furthermore, Nepali youths who have migrated to different parts of the world for labour and other purposes provide Nepal with the notion of "Global Nepali"

to advance the country's soft power. Like the brave Gorkhali soldiers who are one of the essential components of Nepali soft power, the migrants for labour, study, business and other purposes provide ample opportunities to promote Nepal's image and economic objectives. Besides, the incorporation of women into the notion is important. Enhancing the potentiality of women by providing them with opportunities can bring monumental changes in Nepal's economic growth. In conclusion, Nepal's soft power engagement is necessary for the state's development and economic growth. For this purpose, unleashing and exploring Nepal's demography is important to the concept of soft power for Nepal.

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## *Unleashing Nepal's Demography as Soft Power 105*

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# LABOUR DIPLOMACY AND MIGRATION GOVERNANCE IN NEPAL

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the linkage between labour diplomacy and migration governance, which is one of the most interconnected subjects in international relations. Especially in the case of Nepal, almost a quarter of the total working age population is working abroad and the remittance contributes to more than a quarter of its national GDP and greatly influences the socio-economic dynamics of Nepali society. Myriads of socio-economic tangibles, besides macroeconomic variables are intertwined with the country's labour migration phenomena. The paper focusses on analysing different facets of this linkage by distinctly dissecting various issues concerning labour migration, including the gender perspective, on the diplomatic as well as governance front to explore the gap between the economic aspirations of the country and the actual pace of economic development. The paper uses qualitative methods to allow analytical assessment of various government as well as secondary sources of literature, including reports prepared by international bodies. This leads to the conclusion that without proper interlinkage and cooperation between labour diplomacy and migration governance, it is not possible to achieve sustainable economic growth and development of Nepal.*

**Keywords:** *Diplomacy, Migration, Remittance, Labour Governance*

## Introduction

Labour diplomacy is a major tool for economic growth and development of a country. It serves as a means to an economic end and promotes soft power and enhances diplomatic skills to achieve the national interests surrounding economic activities, including migrants and diaspora. Each year, nearly 500,000 working age youth enter the labour market of Nepal. Of them, about two-thirds go abroad for employment. Nepal is one of the major labour sending countries to the Gulf countries and Malaysia (Bashyal, 2019). In

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Nepal, national, bilateral and international policy instruments govern foreign labour migration. Labour migrants also have to follow specific national laws of the countries where they migrate for work.

The meaning, purpose and mechanisms of labour diplomacy vary according to the role of a state, depending on whether it is an origin, destination or transit state, and it highly correlates with the country's migration governance. Despite a whole system of regulations and governance in place, labour diplomacy, a prominent economic tool, has always had difficulty in ensuring a safe and secure economic practice.

Labour migration is not a new phenomenon and has been integrated into the world's complex interdependent economy with the advent of globalisation. With the process of globalisation and the rapid movement of individuals, labour migration has been one of the most studied discourses in the contemporary period, however, literature on the topic deals mostly with the macro-economic aspects of labour migration. Leading experts on this issue say that the incorporation of the migration process in the diplomatic fora in international relations study is not a well-researched area, considering that most of the literature deals only with macro economic effects of labour migration mostly at the macro regional level, often producing little material on socio-economic dimensions and integration in the discourse on migration (Thiollet, 2011 & Dahal, 2011).

Labour diplomacy is not only the use of diplomatic tools, it is also the strategies, methods and processes to achieve the objectives of migration as well as a strategic use of migration flow to secure other aims (Tsourapas, 2017, p.2). Underscoring the prominence of migration flows, Adamson and Tsourapas (2018) have even termed it "the object of interstate policy" (p.3). The states channel their policy practice and diplomatic tools at their disposal to deal with various forms of migration and mobility. Further, Hamilton and Langhorne (2011) describe migration diplomacy as the link between the states' diplomatic practices with international organisations.

It is vital for the understanding of the concept of migration diplomacy in its specific configuration. Sometimes, we can see labour diplomacy and migration diplomacy being used interchangeably. For the same purpose, Adamson and Tsourapas (2018) outline three conditions that narrow the scope of migration diplomacy. In line with the previous arguments, they put the first scope under state diplomacy and link the state actions to the population's mobility to the attainment of diplomatic aims. The integration of international organisations is also covered in the first scope. The second scope makes a clear distinction between migration diplomacy of a state and its overall migration policy. The same is echoed in Hollifield et al's (2014) work on migration diplomacy, drawing on the importance of managing cross-border mobility under migration diplomacy as an international issue (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2018).

The policy of the state needs to draw a line between issues that connect to migration diplomacy, such as tariff rules, internal displacement and diaspora politics and actual diplomatic relations and undertakings between states (Ibid). Generally, those analyses can be interpreted as a connection between migration diplomacy, such as refugee rules, internal displacement and diaspora politics with actual diplomatic relations and undertakings between states. It deals with country specific dynamics of migration diplomacy, as the process and methods largely depend on the political economy, geography, development priorities and resources at disposal.

As a labour originating country and a heavily remittance-reliant economy, labour migrants are also considered as a commodity for export by the country (K.C, 2019). The latest data show that 88 per cent of the Nepali labour force is bound to the top five destination countries, namely Malaysia, Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. However, 172 countries are open for employment to Nepali labour migrants, out of which the government has approved recruitment agencies to handle 110 countries (MoLESS, 2020). More than 4 million Nepalis are working abroad with permission from the state. Thus, the importance of migration diplomacy is done in relation to the prominence of labour migration as a priority financial tool for the economic growth of the country (IFA, 2008).

Apart from the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries and Malaysia, India is another major migrant destination country, and the reality of labour migration to India is such that the open border with this neighbouring country accounts for a large number of undocumented labour migration, especially seasonal labour migration (Bashyal, 2014). The open border between Nepal and India puts it in an unfavourable position for effective governance, and the diplomatic failures on the home front are almost inescapable. Mostly a regional phenomenon, an exodus of Nepali youth to India for work each year stands as a challenge to labour governance. Due to the unique migration process, rules and reciprocal mechanisms, this study does not confine itself to migration to India (Ibid).

The article examines Nepali migration diplomacy and labour migration governance. The paper focusses on analysing different facets of this linkage by distinctly dissecting various challenges in diplomatic practices concerning labour migration. Furthermore, the paper tries to explore multiple fronts of migration diplomacy and migration governance responsible for sustainable economic growth. It also scrutinises labour migration with the main objective to expose the interrelations of three elements: diplomacy, governance and socio-economy of Nepal.

This research paper is basically theoretical, qualitative, descriptive and explorative as well. To understand Nepal's labour diplomacy and governance,

secondary data have been collected based on the study objectives. Secondary data have been collected through the qualitative content analysis method. Books, academic journals, scholarly articles, research papers, theses, grey pieces of literature, such as official documents, reports of an organisation, policy statements, press releases and other relevant publications regarding the issue dealt have been used for collecting information. Some of the sources were accessed from the Internet. The major focus is built around the theory of diplomacy and labour governance and power dynamics.

### **Governance of Nepali Labour Migration**

Global migration governance says that international migration is an inherently trans-boundary issue, and the problems concerning the issue crosses borders that cannot be contained by a single state, which is why there arises a growing need for global governance to systematically address the issue (Betts, 2011). Thus, the prominent roles of the states of origin and the growing complexity of bilateral and multilateral migration negotiations are often not included under the jurisdiction of the global mechanisms in place to regulate and govern the international labour migration process.

Besides international actors, labour migration is governed by myriads of national actors. In the case of Nepal, the government has a layered structure that facilitates labour migration and is often plagued with inefficiencies owing to manpower crunch, insufficient funding and loopholes within the system, which are often misused by different entities. Within the nation of origin itself, it is not just the government that comes under migration governance but also a set of complex structures of private actors involved in the migration process.

The policy of labour migration requires governing various layers involved in the labour source country to regulate and manage the labour migration process. The Government of Nepal has mechanisms in all tiers of government. The Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MoLESS) being the apex body regulates and frames the governance of labour migration. Under the MoLESS, the Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE) works as a key regulatory body while the Foreign Employment Board (FEB) carries out all welfare-related activities while the Foreign Employment Tribunal (FET) works as a semi-judicial organ.

There are also numerous other stakeholders responsible for the efficient regulation of labour migration, including province-based Labour and Employment offices, Vocational Skills Development Training Academy (VSDTA) and the skills development initiative by GoN. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) handles labour diplomacy and Nepal Rastra

Bank (NRB) manages and regulates the remittance industry. There are also regulatory and oversight mechanisms working under GoN - the Parliamentary Committee on Industry, Commerce, Labour and Consumer Interest and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). Besides government bodies, the private sector (recruitment agencies, insurance companies, medical centres and skills development training centres), development partners, as well as civil societies are also essentially involved in the governance process.

The government has enacted three major policy documents that govern labour migration, namely Foreign Employment Policy 2012, Foreign Employment Act 2007 (recently amended in 2018/19) and Foreign Policy Rules 2008. Most of the binding agreements are carried out bilaterally with the receiving states in case of labour governance; however, Nepal has also actively been part of regional as well as global forums of labour migration. The non-binding nature of regional forums, the Colombo Process (CP), Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD), and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and global mechanisms, Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), and Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD) shadows any active participation in the mechanisms and is considered not as efficient as bilateral means (MoLESS, 2020). Nevertheless the government has established multiple institutions and enacted laws and policies to regulate international migration. Nepali labour migration, both international and domestic, however, relies heavily on the private sector. Recruitment agencies play a huge role in managing foreign employment of Nepal. This has led to recruitment frauds and heavy transaction costs overwhelming the foreign employment sector in Nepal (Bashyal, 2019). Despite countless mechanisms in place and reformation on the national governance front, labour migration comes laden with many challenges that need careful handling at the bilateral and multilateral level.

The most effective institution of the origin state is the embassy in the destination country. The role of the staff at the mission is vital in negotiating and managing the problems of migrant workers. Apart from ambassadors and other staff from the Foreign Ministry, the Government of Nepal appoints a counsellor (Labour) and labour attaché to the countries in the Gulf region, Malaysia and South Korea, where a large number of Nepalis are working. For a labour attaché to be assigned, a country should have at least 5,000 Nepali migrants. The labour attaché is selected from among the section officers and undersecretaries at the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security and bodies under it. The ministry also recommends counsellors and attaches to be assigned to the Nepali diplomatic missions in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Their prime objective is to represent the Government of Nepal and hold dialogue with the government of the countries they have been deputed to for resolving problems faced by the Nepali migrant workers. They are responsible for informing the government about the situation of labour and employment and exact information related to immigration in the countries where there are Nepali workers and about the steps being taken by the country of destination for protecting the workers, international human rights and the workers' rights and interests. The systems created by the Nepal government are expected to enable significant numbers of migrant workers to get better access to information related to migration processes, to know their rights and to obtain compensation from recruitment companies and agents.

Despite these provisions, the situation of migrants abroad is vulnerable. Migrant workers are subjected to both tangible and intangible forms of violence, punishment, whimsical treatment, including discrimination and humiliation, and, of course, exploitative contractual arrangements. About 4 million Nepali workers are often accompanied by forced compliance with arbitrary norms if not stripping the migrant of his or her identity, as described in some literatures (Domini, 2019).

Nepal's negotiating position compared to other more 'organised' states such as India or the Philippines is weak. In the case of Nepali migrants in Qatar, the resolution of disputes is particularly difficult in the destination country because all claims need to be submitted to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs while the Nepali Embassy in Doha can only communicate by note verbale to the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Practically, the labour attaché can call the mudir (usually a migrant who manages labourers on behalf of the employer) informally on the migrant's behalf or invite the mudir to come to the embassy for a meeting. There is, however, no obligation for the mudir to comply, and it often fails. In serious cases, too, the embassy writes to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to request for an interview with the Labour Department, because by law it cannot contact the department directly. It takes a long time and in between it does not solve the problem (Ibid). These activities show that there is poor interconnection between the Foreign Ministry and the MoLESS in resolving the pertinent issues of Nepali migrants abroad. In these countries, Nepalis do the lowest rung of manual labour, which mostly consists of "3D jobs" - dirty, difficult and dangerous.

Three to four bodies of Nepali migrant workers arrive in body bags at the Kathmandu airport each day. At least 7,467 migrant workers have died abroad since 2008, according to figures from the government's Labour Migration

Report, 750 of those deaths were reported between 2018 and 2019 (2020). These figures exclude workers who migrate through unauthorised channels and labourers who work in India, because of the bilateral agreement between the two countries. Nepali migrants are often cheated in their home country and face exploitation in the destination country. They, however, are an indispensable part of the huge remittance economy that the country is based on.

### **Economy and Diplomacy**

Challenges pertaining to labour diplomacy and labour governance ultimately affect the national economy and its various facets. A major source of the economy, remittance from labour migration makes up more than 25% of Nepal's GDP and meets the family expenses of 55.8% of the households (MoLESS, 2020). Besides contributions to the GDP and household expenses, remittance is a major source of the country's foreign exchange earnings. More than half the volume of the country's foreign exchange is borne by remittance alone (NRB, 2019). Nepal's national economy is largely functional because of the international labour migration and the remittance it brings home. Labour migration being the most lucrative and feasible source of employment for the Nepali youth, diplomatic efforts are aimed at securing risk-free employment opportunities for a growing number of youth seeking jobs abroad. As an origin state whose economy largely depends on labour migration, it is essential that the nation channelise the remittance into projects requiring large investments to secure a sustainable domestic economy.

Migration diplomacy and its integration with migration governance serve as a means to many ends. Adamson and Tsourapas expounded Keohane and Nye's idea that the linkage between migration diplomacy and national migration governance is a means to pursue the state goals in terms of enhancing security, promoting cultural diplomacy and achieving economic goals (Keohane & Nye, 1987 as cited in Adamson & Tsourapas, 2018, p.2). It is, however, crucial to note that these goals can only be achieved with proper coordination among the national developmental faculties. It has been already established that labour migrants are one of the country's most coveted resources. However, it is also true that it is not a long-term solution for the country's economic prosperity (IFA, 2008). It is not just enough to diversify labour migration to new countries with better working conditions, the government must also identify the skills and competence of the labour migrants and build a suitable economy back home so that the integration is both efficient and productive, and ultimately helps the nation achieve its goal of moving away from the remittance economy to a more sustainable local economy.

The faltering economy of the country and purchasing capacity of individuals can only be remedied by increasing the governance efficiency as well as diplomacy at all levels and securing investment from remittances for developmental activities for a long-term solution.

### **Challenges to Diplomacy and Governance**

The challenges to labour diplomacy and governance emanate not only from the diplomatic impediments but also from the innate connection to the precarious nature of migration regulations compounded by socio-economic hurdles. Most of these strategies and methods/tools depend on multiple factors, namely national interests, foreign policy goals, bargaining power, negotiating skills and nature of agreements/ MOUs, both bilateral as well as multilateral (Adamson and Tsourapas, 2018). Along with them, diplomatic maneuvers are also at the same time highly subjected to national development strategy and politico-economic scope of labour migration (Jones & Basnett, 2013, pp.16-17).

Relations between countries today are definitely not balanced nor were they in the past. The rich and resourceful states have an upper hand in any bargaining or bilateral agreement. Nepali labour migrants are working in 172 countries around the world, and of them (except in India) more than 85% are concentrated in the Gulf region and Malaysia. As per the IOM (2019), although all these nations are members of ILO, none of them are members of the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) even though Qatar and Saudi Arabia hold observer status. None of them are signatory to the 1949 Migration for Employment Convention, the 1975 Migrant Workers Convention (Supplementary Provisions) and the 1990 International Convention on the protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. Thus, despite the huge international uproar and active involvement of a number of nations, the instruments in place to tackle lapses in international labour migration trends are rendered more or less ineffective. The diplomatic tools and techniques in place used for diplomatic intervention, however, are subject to difficulties in maneuvering the legal system in the destination countries. There is also the dilemma of advancing economic relations while maintaining friendly diplomatic relations on the one hand and innovating measures to address the issues of labour migrants on the other.

While the national policies in the destination countries and rather less effective international mechanisms present themselves as a roadblock to labour governance, the shortcomings in governance on the home front themselves present yet another challenge (Gordon 2009). The diplomatic community or missions in place often suffer from inadequate funding and training. Farbenlum

(2017) on the other hand points towards the lack of qualified human resources to lead country-specific missions with adequate experience in handling labour governance and considers it as yet another impediment in place. Among the shortcomings is the trajectory of personnel selection for diplomatic missions. There is criticism concerning the appointment of inept individuals on the basis of their political inclination or familial interest rather than competency and fairness of system (Shrestha 2019). Many researchers in the field echo the same sentiments regarding the ill capacity and frivolous appointment of diplomatic candidates (Malit & Devkota, 2019). Along with the defective appointment, the absence of provisions to check on diplomatic personnel and their activities in the mission adds to the dysfunctional diplomatic and governance process.

For example, the recent systemic change in the labour laws of Qatar with the freedom to change jobs along with fair minimum wage and removal of exit permits (ILO, 2019) and a recent end of the standstill with Malaysia (Mandal, 2019) -two of the major priority destinations for Nepali labour migrants- can be viewed as a welcome change for international labour migration. However, the only way to make sure there is effective implementation is through empowered and vigilant government agencies both at home and in the destination countries. In the past, this inadequacy had rendered Nepali missions and diplomatic agreements almost useless in putting pressure on the host governments to uphold the human rights security clauses.

Performance evaluation is key to addressing this particular challenge facing Nepali missions abroad. Performance evaluation can ensure optimal efficiency of government appointees, and, as such, it can have a positive impact on the diplomatic efforts being made in securing safe and dignified labour migration. Performance evaluation as a regulating mechanism can help ensure accountability and transparency from the missions and their personnel abroad. A lack thereof has rendered the enforcement of laws and policies introduced by Nepal previously ineffective in securing the rights of migrant labourers and making sure they are well protected under the law (Khanal, 2019).

Increasing the performance efficiency of the personnel alone cannot, however, address the challenges posed in securing better working conditions, which is why time and again the country has realised the need to diversify its options regarding foreign employment. According to Palet (2018), the Gulf countries and Malaysia are seeking to diversify their labour supply by approaching African countries should there be a labour crunch in light of the increasing conditionality put in place by the sending states.

The government has been permissive towards migrants travelling through unofficial channels, which have opened up alternative avenues for labour migration, reducing the dependency on the Gulf countries and Malaysia (Sedhai, 2014). With the GCC and Malaysia still being the primary hub for labour migration, the government needs to sign bilateral agreements with the 100 plus countries and explore new frontiers so that labour migrants can reap immediate benefits (Mandal, 2019).

One other thing the authorities need to ensure is skill development among the Nepali job seekers so as to align their skills with the demand in the new destinations as more than 50% (MoLESS, 2020) of labour migrants today are unskilled. Integrating the labour migrants into the national economy is both an economic as well as a social challenge. Nearly 1,500 Nepali youths head for the Gulf States and Malaysia every day. The latest report on labour migration, published by MoLESS, shows that 59% of all labour migrants bound abroad for employment in 2018/19 took up low skilled jobs, a 5 per cent decrease from the previous year 2017/18 (MoLESS, 2020). The data reveals the percentage of outbound unskilled labourers in 2018/19 only. The lack of data on the already existing labour migrants and their skills makes it difficult to estimate the exact percentage of migrant labourers with particular skills.

Another very prominent socio-economic challenge to sustainable economic growth is gender disparity. Labour migration in Nepal is a very “gendered phenomenon”. ILO calls it a global phenomenon, reporting that while the labour force participation rate for men stood at 74%, the same for women was only 47% in 2019 (2020). The situation is more precarious for female labour migrants as they opt for informal channels to evade the government’s ban on women under 24 seeking employment as domestic help in the GCC (Sijapati et al., 2015). Hassles and increased risks of exploitation of women prevent a large portion of the country’s total population from entering the labour market. There is, thus, a huge challenge in integrating the female population into labour migration with ensured safety from various risks that come attached to it.

This means adhering to the traditional gender roles, which puts pressure on the women workforce to rely on the male income despite the equal rights guaranteed by the state. In failing to secure ways to remove the gender barrier for female migrant workers wishing to support their families, the country is made to lose a huge workforce to social stigmas and legal preventions. The GCC and Malaysia mostly employ women labour migrants as domestic help and care givers, which is broadly a limited employment sector compared to male migrants (Bashyal, 2019). The rationale given for the imposition of

restrictions on women is to “safeguard women from exploitation and abuse”. Such provisions have, however, forced women to seek other ways to go abroad, primarily through irregular channels (Ibid, 2019). A series of bans imposed on women migrants as part of the institutional effort to keep women migrants safe from abuse and exploitation from the employers abroad reflect the patriarchal mentality of the system. Since the very beginning of regulating foreign employment in Nepal, with the Foreign Employment Act passed in 1985, the institutional inequality marginalising women migrants has existed. The government has failed to use diplomatic tools to ease the situation for the migrant women and largely escaped dealing with the actual problem in light of the ban in place till date. The gendered migration pattern is largely attributed to the patriarchal notion of Nepali society that has also infiltrated the governance system (Ibid, 2019). Nepal has to conduct effective diplomacy at all possible layers in the major foreign employment destinations, constantly putting forth its cases and advancing its interests. The government must provide sufficient resources to diplomatic missions to take proactive measures to ensure the protection of Nepali workers’ rights, including the right to return home safe and to get the salaries and benefits as stipulated in their job contracts. This could lower the migration cost being borne by the workers, and facilitate the implementation of the free ticket and free visa regime (Kharel, 2019). Immature diplomacy can cost the nation’s standing in the global arena and its economic interests dearly, although the consequences may not be apparent immediately.

The inability of the mission staff to speak their language and inadequate assistance funds have deeply impacted their capacity to immediately resolve issues of the migrant workers. In the Gulf countries, the current ratio between frontline state bureaucrats and the total migrant population is very low, which has significantly disrupted their administrative capacity to provide conflict mediation and “follow-up” procedures for migrant workers.

In the context of labour migration, labour-origin states often are severely constrained by political, institutional and economic factors that require their staffs to fully uphold their policy principles and values within the bureaucracy. Their efficiency matters in resolving the vulnerable position of migrants in the destination countries.

Likewise, expediting job creation on the home front is necessary not only for the reintegration process but also because foreign employment options are drying up in the Gulf countries and Malaysia for the migrant labourers. Global trade and the geopolitical trajectory have been in tension with manufacturing hit hard, with predictions of a global recession underway (IMF, 2019), and with

the recent pandemic afflicting the world economy, this is highly likely. With the labour market meeting a recession owing to the current corona pandemic, it is clear that the country's economy will be hit hard as remittance is affected as jobs, especially in the top destination countries, plummet.

### **Conclusion**

The government has been updating the policy framework and putting more structural mechanisms in place to enhance efficiency on the governance and diplomatic front, but the gap between policy formulation and effective enforcement has led private as well as government institutions and even individuals to misuse the loophole to dupe aspiring migrants, which ultimately breaks the trust on the system while increasing the gap between government efforts and citizens' trust in the system in place. Besides the huge structural flaw, Pyakurel (2016) also assesses the inadequacy in terms of both personnel and funds for technical assistance required at many levels on the diplomatic front as one of the major impediments in the smooth functioning of migration governance.

Similarly, migrants undergo several bad experiences during the migration process, which put their physical, mental and social well-being at risk. Upon reaching the destination, too, migrants often face various forms of exploitation, low level of income and social exclusion, which have a negative impact on the family and their health, especially in the destination countries and at home.

Economic prosperity, national security and promotion of national interests on various fronts are some of the basic elements attached to diplomatic endeavours of the national government. To achieve this, Nepal has been actively involved in national, regional as well as international forums. However, there is an intrinsic structural impediment to labour governance and labour migration. This impediment is present in all three tiers, namely country of origin, destination country as well as international mechanisms. It puts labour migration and interests of Nepali labourers in peril. The cycle is thus stuck in a deadlock, with the labour migrants at the receiving end. The pertaining challenges to labour diplomacy have been dissected, and the governance mechanisms have identified the socio-economic variables affecting Nepali labour governance. This has led to the conclusion that even though remittance accounts for a large quarter of the national GDP, inclusive economic growth has not been achieved due to the many accompanying social and political impediments.

All this demands strengthened diplomatic maneuvers to secure national skills; young motivated labour migrant population; efficient labour governance both domestically and internationally; and a sound socio-economic environment on

the home front. In this context, Nepal, as such, needs to assess its diplomatic maneuvers in labour diplomacy in terms of its bargaining power, national interest priorities, economic urgency and domestic policies. Finally, it requires more coherent coordination between domestic and foreign institutions to deal with migrants' vulnerabilities.

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# ETHOS OF ‘VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM’ IN NEPAL’S CONTRIBUTION TO UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

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## Abstract

*After joining the United Nations in 1955, Nepal not only initiated its non-isolationist foreign policy, but also effectively championed the policy of non-alignment, world peace and non-intervention at several multilateral forums and UN bodies. The most outstanding and globally applauded effort has been Nepal’s contribution in the maintenance of global peace and security through UN peacekeeping missions. Adhering to the eastern philosophy of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’, which envisions the entire world as one family, today, Nepal is the 5th largest troop contributor to the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO). But most of the literature produced on Nepal’s role in the United Nations peacekeeping mission are either too general and mere archival or focussed only on glorifying the contribution of Nepali soldiers in different peacekeeping missions. Identifying the same research gap, this study aims to appraise Nepal’s participation in UN peacekeeping missions from Nepal’s foreign policy objective of world peace. To fulfill the same objective, the ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam has been foregrounded in the study. Initially, the general understanding of UN peacekeeping in Nepal was associated with bravery, which was later replaced by the concept of ‘kamaune’, which means to earn from the missions. But this study has deliberately cloaked the economic variable of peacekeeping and foregrounds the philosophical drive to highlight how Nepal’s peacekeeping should find more places in political and foreign policy measurement rather than being confined to the financial and institutional variables.*

**Keywords:** Peacekeeping, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, Nepali Peacekeepers, Nepal

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## **Introduction**

From the Congolese rainforests to the snowy mountains of the Golan Heights or from the Iraqi deserts to the conflict-plagued societies of South Sudan and Central African Republic (Malla, 2017), Nepali peacekeepers have experiences of serving in an uncertain, unpredictable and hostile environment. But what actually obliges them to serve in such a capricious environment? While defusing mines or operating observation posts or conducting regular patrols in such an unpredictable environment, there is always a chance of rockets and shells falling upon their cantonments (Malla, 2016). Are relatively higher wages and incomes the only obligation in inspiring them to coexist with the uncertainties in the conflict-ridden and post-conflict societies? Or its more because of one's interest in a formidable adventure? For a lower middle-class soldier from Nepal, the economic variable is quite often cited, while for an affluent soldier, the adventure variable is opted. But while such commonplace remarks concentrate only on individual benefits, this study says: 'No' It's not just because of the wages and income, but more because of the common good of mankind, upon which the philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' relies. Of course, the financial gains to the nation through the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations cannot be denied, but peacekeepers' multidimensional responsibilities in maintaining peace, providing humanitarian assistance, protecting human rights and conducting developmental activities in post-conflict societies should also be analysed from the foreign policy objectives of the sending countries. Nepal's foreign policy objectives of world peace and abiding faith in the UN Charter and international law (MoFA, n.d.) have always accommodated the ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, and it is the performability of the same foreign policy objectives by the peacekeeping soldiers in the host societies (Sharma, 2009), as per the mandate of the United Nations.

Having its origin in Hitopadesh, the philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' emphasises the attainability of world peace by embracing the spiritual insight that the entire world is one family irrespective of caste, class, ethnicity, gender and all kinds of divisive forces (Behera & Omotoyosi, 2020). Pointedly useful in alleviating all kinds of global and regional conflicts, and also for the establishment of international peace, this philosophy of oneness aims to promote peace-building, conflict resolution, human security, principle of the non-use of force and international cooperation in world politics (VIF Seminar, 2019). The largest intergovernmental organisation, the United Nations Organisation (UNO) is itself mandated to perform manifold functions, but its key responsibility, as inscribed in Article 1 of the United Nations Charter,

*Ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' in Nepal's Contribution to UNPKO 125*

lies in the maintenance of peace and security around the world (UN Charter). The same objective of promoting and protecting global peace and security resonates with the eastern philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', which means the entire world is one family (Chatterjee, 2005). The United Nations performs this important function by applying different methods, such as pacific settlement of disputes, collective security and preventive diplomacy, or peacekeeping (UN Charter). Although there is no explanation as to what necessitated peacekeeping in the UN Charter, it is an important innovation of the UN, aimed at the maintenance of international peace and security, based on the principle that an impartial presence on the ground can ease the pressures between antagonistic parties (United Nations, n.d.) and make space for political transactions (Erendor, 2017).

The concept of a peacekeeping mission evolved from the idea of collective security (Thakur, 2017) and for the common benefit of mankind, advanced by the philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. UN peacekeeping is not carried out only by military forces, which assist the parties in transitioning from violent conflict to peace and stabilise conflict situations (Sharma, 2009). The main objective of the peacekeeping operations is to constitute a robust and resilient social and political structure for an enduring peace in war-torn or conflict-ridden countries (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.). To fulfill the same objectives, the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations undertake different strategies: negotiate ceasefires and separation of forces; authorise a preventive deployment of peacekeepers before an actual conflict breaks out; implement comprehensive peace settlements; exercise humanitarian operations and provide humanitarian assistance; call for forceful deployment if all efforts fail; monitor elections and human rights; remove landmines; also engage in the reconstruction of infrastructure and oversee the repatriation of refugees (Erendor, 2017). Member countries that are committed to the philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' send their troops to the affected or warring countries voluntarily as per the command of the UN, and they hold the authority to send or withdraw peacekeepers (Suhrke, 2011). Peacekeepers may include military officers, police personnel and civilian staff from different countries, and they perform certain functions: observe peace processes, monitor elections, monitor maintenance of law and order, and improve the human rights situation by being neutral and impartial (Yilmaz, 2005). They may also provide medical help, assist in the resettlement of refugees and work to restore normalcy in strife-torn areas (Bhusal & Parajuli, 2017). Thus, peacekeeping is a multinational and multidimensional operation set up by UN party nations, which incorporates military staff, but without authorisation powers, to help

create situations for sustainable peace or restore peace in locales of struggle (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.).

Since its inception, peacekeeping has been pivotal in dealing with serious internal clashes inside a nation or a geographical region, where peace is otherwise likely to flounder. Thus, it is usually perceived as one of the successful activities adopted by the United Nations, although the term ‘peacekeeping’ itself isn’t specifically mentioned in the UN Charter (United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, 2008). There’s no particular Article or Chapter that alludes absolutely to what a peacekeeping operation involves, the criteria to set it up or rules for sending it (Yilmaz, 2005). Former Under Secretary-General of the UN Department of Peace Operations perceived peacekeeping as the creative interpretation of the UN Charter by the organisation’s first leaders (Sharma, 2009). Peacekeeping is often alluded to as a “Chapter Six and a Half” after Dag Hammarskjöld, former Secretary-General, conceptualised it (Karlsrud, 2018). “Chapter Six and a Half” means that peacekeeping fell somewhere between Chapter 6 (on the Pacific Settlement of Dispute) and Chapter 7 (on Action concerning Threats to Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Animosity) (Yilmaz, 2005). According to Chapters VI and VII, the UN Security Council (UNSC) can authorise peacekeeping operations in the international arena in close coordination with other departmental structures, mainly, the General Assembly, the Secretary-General and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (Erendor, 2017). Whenever coordination between these structures is not easily achieved, peacekeeping becomes a complicated task (Gowan, 2019). Also, the international community must diagnose the issue or problem before endorsing peacekeeping (Erendor, 2017).

As a third party intervention, UN peacekeeping aims to resolve conflicts between the states through the deployment of unarmed or lightly armed military personnel from member countries, depending on the mandate. The first mission was established in 1948 by the United Nations Security Council by sending military observers to watch and monitor the agreement (armistice) between the Arab states and Israel, referred to as the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) (Yilmaz, 2005). Deployment of unarmed military observers is more of a symbolic nature aimed at internationalising the problem (Sharma, 2009). Nepal had sent its Force Commanders and troops both as peacekeepers and observers in the UNTSO established in Jerusalem in 1948, India/Pakistan in 1966, Congo in 1966 and Cyprus in 1973, and UNEF-I and II during 1973/74, UNDOF in 1974 and UNIFIL in 1978 (Sharma, 2009). To institutionalise peacekeeping, the UN Department

*Ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' in Nepal's Contribution to UNPKO 127*

of Peacekeeping Operations (UNDPKO) was established in 1992, which is funded by the members of the UN (Yilmaz, 2005). UNDPKO assists the Security Council and the Secretary-General to formulate policies, establish procedures and make decisions regarding peacekeeping (Erendor, 2017). It also works with governmental and non-governmental solidarities to integrate the endeavours of the UN within the concept of peacekeeping operations, and makes recommendations for the establishment of new missions and in managing ongoing missions.

Throughout the Cold War period, traditional peacekeeping was limited to interposing troops between belligerent parties, supervising and verifying ceasefires, maintaining the status quo, and observing, monitoring and reporting different activities in a conflict-laden or post-conflict setting (Department of Peace Operations, n.d.). The nature and scope of peacekeeping changed with the end of the Cold War, giving birth to complex multidimensional peacekeeping operations focussed on facilitating the political process, creating a secure and stable environment, strengthening the state security apparatus and providing a framework for ensuring that all UN and other actors pursued their activities with close civil and military cooperation as the key to success (Yilmaz, 2005). Post-Cold War peacekeeping operations became more adaptable to new environments and integrated new features, which conventional peacekeeping lacked, such as observing or conducting elections, demobilisation, military separation, restoration, repatriation, information dispersal, rule of law, human rights monitoring, guaranteeing the smooth transportation of humanitarian relief materials, financial advancement, guarding the weapons surrendered by the warring parties, helping the restructuring of the state in war-torn social orders and the civil administration (Erendor, 2017). With the end of the Cold War, the number of countries contributing to peacekeeping operations surged up. But the interest to contribute was triggered by financial and institutional variables rather than on political and foreign policy measurements (Perry & Smith, 2013). During the post-Cold War period, the number, estimate and scope of peacekeeping missions have expanded, partly because of the growing demand for an impartial third party, and also because of the unprecedented coordination among the members of the Security Council. Today, peacekeeping is perceived as impartial and legitimate, and widely accepted as a third party intervention, and has served to restore peace in different parts of the world (United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, 2008).

After getting membership of the United Nations on December 14, 1955, Nepal's contribution and commitment to global peace, security and disarmament has

always been untiring (Bhattarai, 2013). Since then, Nepal has effectively participated in the UN General Assembly, UNSC, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and other UN bodies, calling for the protection of the rights of small landlocked countries and developing countries, supporting the decisions and resolutions passed by the UN, and also seeking the promotion and protection of human rights (Bhusal & Parajuli, 2017). However, the most honoured, recognised and striking contribution made by Nepal to the UN is peacekeeping (Pokharel, 2019), which has been variously appreciated particularly by the host countries and almost all the UN Secretary-Generals so far (UN press release, 2008). Committed to the philosophy of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’, Nepali peacekeepers, with their bravery, sincerity and adaptability, have not only contributed to international peace and security but have also played a significant role in creating space for Nepal in the international arena (Pokharel, 2019). Thus, the objective of this paper is to explore and analyse the significance of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ in Nepal’s contribution to the UNPKO and to assess how far Nepal’s foreign policy has embraced the eastern philosophy of the “Entire world is a family” in conflict management and peace-building in different regions of the world. With the same objective, this research, however, cloaks the financial variable by foregrounding the philosophy of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’. Upon the same realisation, this study believes that Nepal’s peacekeeping mission is not only prompted by the financial factor, ideological fervour and institutional motive but also as a result of Nepal’s foreign policy objectives of world peace, international law and the UN charter.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative research, this study is based on information collected, especially through secondary data, including reports published by the UN on peacekeeping, general articles published in newspapers and magazines about Nepal’s contribution in peacekeeping and academic articles on UN peacekeeping missions. Statistical reports published by the Nepal Army, Nepal Police, Armed Police Force (APF) and the United Nations have been studied to discuss the institutional participation, pre-deployment training and their contribution at different periods of time. Besides, government reports, statistics, speeches delivered by authorities from Nepal and the United Nations on Nepal’s peacekeeping missions have been studied and analysed. The role of the Nepal Army Birendra Peace Operations Training Centre and the contribution of the Nepali Army, Nepal Police and APF have been analytically reviewed. Practical significance and the relevancy of the eastern philosophy of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ in the peacekeeping missions are succinctly

discussed. Media sources were also reviewed to understand the various issues of Nepal's role in peacekeeping. The themes that emerged from the reviews were thematically analysed and interpreted.

## **Results**

### **An Internationalist Approach**

Nepal's isolationist foreign policy came to an end after joining the United Nations in 1955. The same non-isolationist foreign policy inspired Nepal to implement the ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' through peacekeeping. Statistical information and archival details published by the Nepali Army and the United Nations on Nepali peacekeeping also indicate Nepal's internationalist approach through the UNPKOs. Even though militarily weak, Nepal gave extensive importance to the peacekeeping role of the United Nations, not only by supporting all the peacekeeping actions but also strengthening the peacekeeping role of the United Nations (Shrestha, 1977). Nepal gave a nod for the establishment of the United Nations Emergency Force (GAOR Emergency Special Sessions, 1956), which indicates Nepal's unflinching belief in promoting world peace and universal harmony by mitigating conflict and establishing peace through the exercise of the philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. Nepal started its journey in peacekeeping with the first participation of the Nepali Army in the United Nations Observer Group in Lebanon (UNOGIL) in 1958, which was set up by Security Council resolution 128 (1958), where the Nepali Army served as an observation group to ensure there was no illegal infiltration of personnel or supply of arms or other materials across the Lebanese borders (United Nations Archives, 1958). After that in 1966, Nepal was involved in the UN supervision mission in India and Pakistan (UNIPOM), where the primary responsibility was to observe and report on breaches of the ceasefire called by the UNSC. Contribution of the Nepal Army in UNOGIL UNIPOM was extremely successful and was lauded by the UN (Maskey, 1996). The first Nepali battalion-sized contingent, the Purano Gorakh Battalion, was deployed in Egypt with the Second United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF II) in 1974 (Bhusal & Parajuli, 2017). Nepal has always believed that the peacekeeping capabilities of the United Nations should be strengthened (GAOR 22nd Session, 1967). During the 23<sup>rd</sup> session of the General Assembly, Nepal stated:

We believe that in the absence of the total elimination of the possibility of conflict between countries, an objective whose achievement is rather doubtful in the present circumstances, inability on the part of the United Nations to conduct its peacekeeping operation, for any reason whatsoever, will take away the effectiveness of the world body, and it will not inspire the same degree of confidence from the smaller nations it has been inspired up till now.

While spreading the ethos of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’, Nepal was still meticulous about how peacekeeping may be misused by the big powers in violating the territorial integrity of small countries. Nepal’s disapproval and condemnation of Soviet intervention in Hungary’s internal affairs was an apt example. Nepal’s stance was different (GAOR 14th Session, 1959) from the position taken by many of the non-aligned states (Shrestha, 1977). Nepal’s participation in international peacekeeping missions from 1958 to 1990, which was also the period of the first generation of peacekeeping (Sharma, 2009), helped Nepal to shield its sovereignty, safeguard its territorial integrity and defend its national independence because regime changes and political transformations, both in and outside of the country, had posed a grave challenge to Nepal’s survival as a nation state (Rawal, 2015). Throughout the partyless Panchayat period, particularly from 1960 to 1990, the Nepal Army solely participated in five different peacekeeping missions.

*Nepali Peacekeepers in UN Peacekeeping Missions*

S.N	MISSION	Year
1.	United Nations India-Pakistan Observation Mission (UNIPOM) - Military Observers	1966
2.	The Second United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF II) -Troops	1974
3.	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) - Troops	1978
4.	United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT)	1989
5.	United Nations Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan (UNGOMAP I/II), Office of Secretary-General in Afghanistan and Pakistan (OSGAP I/II/III) - Military Observers	1989

*Table (1): Participation of Nepali Peacekeepers in UN Peacekeeping (1960- 1990)*

Peacekeeping during the Panchayat era was the upshot of King Mahendra’s internationalist approach, which concurrently strengthened Nepal’s political independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity (Rawal, 2015). As a part of his internationalist approach, King Mahendra integrated peacekeeping efforts with the country’s foreign policy objectives, which also projected Nepal’s image in the international arena (Rawal, 2015). Because of the same internationalist approach, Nepal not only became a non-permanent member of the Security Council twice during the Panchayat period (Khand, 2009) but also endowed on Nepal a responsibility to lead the Commission of Investigation into the Conditions and Circumstances resulting in the tragic death of then Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold, who was killed in a plane crash in 1961 (Bhusal & Parajuli, 2017).

### **Increasing Presence of the Nepali Army**

With the end of the Panchayat period, there was a perceptible upsurge in the participation of the Nepali Army in peacekeeping missions for the following reasons:

- a. The nature, scope and idea of security witnessed a paradigm shift after 1990, which also obliged the security apparatus in Nepal to comply with the changing dynamics of security;
- b. With the establishment of multiparty democracy and constitutional monarchy in 1990, and also with end of the Cold War, the power centralised on the palace and the army gradually got devolved (Rawal, 2015);
- c. Because of the two aforementioned reasons, the role of the Nepali Army inside the country no longer remained the same as during the Panchayat period. There was a great transformation in their roles and status, as they were not confined to ensuring the security of only the royal family;
- d. Also, there was growing demand for peacekeepers with the rise of internal conflicts in the post-Cold War period (Posen, 1993). Nepali peacekeepers during this period served in various conflict zones, including Africa, the Caribbean, Middle East and East Europe, where their roles were highly appreciated;
- e. Also, by 1990, the Nepali Army had accumulated the required expertise in assisting parties in transition from violent conflict to peace, and by then had also gathered the experience of working with other components of UN missions, both military and civilian, in a multicultural locale.

As the scope and area of peacekeeping expanded with the end of the Cold War, the Nepal Army increased its participation in multidimensional peacekeeping by sending peacekeeping troops and military observers, and by serving as force commanders and staff officers (Rawal, 2015). In 1993, Lt. Gen. Krishna Narayan Singh Thapa served as the Force Commander of the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM); Lt. Gen. Chitra Bahadur Gurung as Military Advisor to the UN Secretary-General; and Lt. Gen. Bala Nanda Sharma as the Head of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in 2004 (NADPKO, 2008).

#### *Nepali Peacekeepers in UN Peacekeeping Missions*

S.N	MISSION	Year
1.	United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM) - Force Commander	1991
2.	United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH) - Peacekeeping Troops	1991

3.	United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) - Chief of Staff	1992
4.	United Nations Intervention in Somalia (UNISOM) - Peacekeeping Troops	1993
5.	United Nations Protection Force (UNPF/UNPROFOR) - Peacekeeping Troops	1994
6.	United Nations Guard Contingent in Iraq (UNGCI) - Peacekeeping Troops	1995
7.	United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES) - Military Observers	1996
8.	United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP) - Military Observers	1996
9.	United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) - Military Observers	1996
10.	United Nations Mission of Observers in Prevlaka (UNMOP) - Military Observers	1998
11.	United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) - Military Observers	1999
12.	United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL/UNAMSIL) - Peacekeeping Troops	1999
13.	United Nations Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) - Peacekeeping Troops	1999
14.	United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET/UNTAET/UNMISSET) - Peacekeeping Troops	1999
15.	United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) - Force Commander	1999
16.	United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) - Military Observers	2000
17.	United Nations Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (MINUCI/UNOCI) - Military Observers	2003
19.	United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) - Peacekeeping Troops	2003
20.	United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) - Force Commander & Staff	2004
21.	United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) - Peacekeeping Troops	2004
22.	United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB) - Peacekeeping Troops	2004
23.	United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) - Peacekeeping Troops	2004

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*Ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' in Nepal's Contribution to UNPKO 133*

*Table (2): Participation of Nepali Peacekeepers in UN Peacekeeping (1990-2005)*

As the political parties wrangled over assorted domestic political issues, the internationalist approach that the Panchayat period had effectively shouldered was impacted after 1990. As a result, peacekeeping and foreign policy couldn't go hand-in-hand, and participation in the peacekeeping mission was largely confined to contribution from the Nepali Army (Rawal, 2015). Even during the period of the Maoist insurgency, which stood as a solemn challenge for the Nepal Army, participation of the Nepali Army in peacekeeping operations remained largely unchanged, as the size of the Nepali Army bourgeoned for the purpose of counterinsurgency operations (Sapkota, 2009).

*Nepali Peacekeepers in UN Peacekeeping Missions*

S.N	MISSION	Year
1.	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) - Peacekeeping Troops	2006
2.	United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) - Military Observers	2007
3.	United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT) - Military Observers and Peacekeeping Troops	2008
4.	United Nations-African Union Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) - Military Observers and Peacekeeping Troops	2008
5.	United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) - Staff Officer and Peacekeeping Troops	2008
6.	United Nations Integrated Mission in East Timor (UNMIT) - Military Observer	2008
7.	United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) - Military Observer	2010
8.	United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) - Military Observers and Peacekeeping Troops	2011
9.	United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) - Staff Officers	2012
10.	United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) - Military Observers and Staff Officers	2012
11.	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) - Peacekeeping Troops	2013

12.	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) - Military Observers and Staff Officers	2014
13.	United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) - Peacekeeping Troops	2016
14.	United Nations Mission in support of the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) - Military Observer	2019

*Table (3): Participation of Nepali Peacekeepers in UN Peacekeeping (2005-2019)*

### **Nepal Police and APF in Peacekeeping Missions**

Before 1990, Nepali peacekeeping missions solely involved participants from the Nepali Army, and because of its expertise and experiences, the Army also continued into the second generation peacekeeping efforts (Sharma, 2009). Until the end of the Cold War, the Nepali Army had already participated in 13 missions (Directorate of Public Relations Nepali Army, 2008). But following the political change of 1990 and particularly with UNSC resolution 1265 (1999), the first resolution on civilian protection, the Nepal Police also started participating in the UNPKOs. Before UNSC resolution 1265, peacekeeping was restricted to military tasks. But in 1999, as soon as the then Secretary-General acknowledged that for peacekeeping to be multidimensional and comprehensive, UNPKOs shouldn't be confined to military tasks but should also embrace civilian police activities, UNSC resolution 1265 underscored the role of the civilian police in ensuring the safety of the civilians (Sebastian, 2015). The first participation of the Nepal Police was in former Yugoslavia (United Nations Protection Force, UNPROFOR) in 1992 (Bhusal & Parajuli, 2017). Since then, it has also contributed in Haiti (United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti, MINUSTAH), Darfur (United Nations-African Union Hybrid Mission in Darfur, UNAMID), Somalia (UN Assistance Mission in Somalia, UNSOM) and South Sudan (United Nations Mission in South Sudan, UNMISS) as peacekeepers (UN Division, 2018). As of 2018, 2,886 Nepal Police personnel--2,769 men and 117 women--as Civilian Police (CIVPOL)/ United Nations Police (UNPOL)/ Individual Police Officers (IPOs) have participated in various UN Missions, while the total participation of Nepal Police personnel as Individual Police Officers (IPOs)/ Formed Police Units (FPU's) in various UN missions stands at 8,056 (which includes 7,559 males and 497 females) (UN Division, 2018).

*Ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' in Nepal's Contribution to UNPKO 135*

S.N.	Participated from	Country	Missions	SSP	SP	DSP	INS	SI	ASI	HC	PC	Total	M	F	Remarks
1	3/12/1992	Former Yugoslavia	UNPROFOR	10	26	35	59	76	22	16	244	240	4		
2	2/5/1996	„ „ Slavonia	UNTAES	1	3	7	9	10	5	3	7	45	44	1	
3	3/19/1996	„ „ Bosnia	UNIPTF/ UNMIBH	3	16	48	70	68	53	7	8	273	269	4	
4	7/27/1999	„ „ Kosovo	UNMIK	2	1	26	102	70	17	6	2	226	220	6	
5	8/6/1992	Cambodia	UNTAC	1	1	7	9	15	21	13	19	86	84	2	
6	5/31/1994	Mozambique	ONUMOZ	1	22	28						51	51		
7	8/2/1995	Netherlands	UNICTY	1	1	1						2	1	1	Professional Post
8	10/29/1995	Rwanda	UNICTR	1	1	1						3	2	1	Professional Post
9	11/8/1995	Iraq	UNGCI	8	13	49	14	1				85	85		
	8/5/2012		UNAMI	1								1	1		
10	7/4/1999	East Timor	UNTAET/ UNMISSET/ UNMIT	1	20	74	153	123	23	3	397	380	17		
11	4/15/2000	Sierra Leone	UNAMSIL	3	10	18						31	29	2	
	2/11/2006		UNOISIL	2	1							3	3		

12	11/16/2001	UN DPKO	New York	1	1	1	3	3	Professional Post					
13	11/17/2001	UN Afg. Desk	New York	1			1	1	Professional Post					
14	12/15/2001	Congo	MONUC	2			2	2						
15	3/12/2002	Afghanistan	UNAMA (Adv. SRSG)	3	5		8	8						
16	12/2/2003		UNMIL	11	34	50	38	5	1	139	136	3		
17	14/06/2015	Liberia	UNMIL	1						1	1			
18	15/03/1995 20/09/2004	Haiti	UNMIH/ MINUSTAH	11	25	74	69	56	16	251	242	9		
19	8/5/2005	Sudan	UNMIS	2	17	38	80	40	2	179	170	9		
20	10.7.2011 to 2018	South Sudan	UNMISS	3	22	14	36	4		1	80	70	10	
21	12/3/2006 to 2018	Sudan Darfur	UNAMID	10	25	96	266	316	35	14	6	768	720	48
			UNAMID	1	1					2	2			
22	24/03/2006	Ivory Coast	UNOCI	1						1	1			
23	28/02.2015 to 2018	Somalia	UNSOM		2	2				4	4			
Grand Total				46	152	507	901	880	271	70	59	2886	2769	117

(The above table includes those police personnel who are currently serving in the UN)

*Ethos of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ in Nepal’s Contribution to UNPKO 137*

Also, the Armed Police Force, “a relatively new paramilitary force in Nepal” (Sharma, 2009), has been contributing as peacekeepers to different conflict-ridden regions of the world. Since October 2002, the Armed Police Force, Nepal has been sending its personnel to various UN Peacekeeping Missions in Iraq (United Nations Guards Contingent in Iraq, UNGCI), Kosovo (United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, UNMIK), Liberia (United Nations Mission in Liberia, UNMIL), Sierra Leone (United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL), Haiti (United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti, MINUSTAH), Sudan (United Nations Mission in Sudan, UNMIS and United Nations Mission in South Sudan, UNMISS), Darfur (United Nations-African Union Hybrid Mission in Darfur, UNAMID), Somalia (United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, UNSOM), East Timor (United Nations Integrated Mission in East Timor, UNMIT) and Cyprus (United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, UNFICYP) as UN Police advisors, instructors, monitors and contingent as a whole. Altogether 6,121 Armed Police personnel have participated as members of the Formed Police Unit (FPU) contingent while 739 personnel have served as UN Police (UNPOL) until 2016 (Armed Police Force, 2017).

Countrywise Participated IPOS + Professional Post 2003-2018

S.N	Mission Name	DIG	SSP	SP	DSP	Insp	SSSI	SI	ASI	SHC	HC	Total	Remarks
1.	UNMIL		2	9	20	15	1	8				55	
2.	UNMIS		6	9	39	16		3	1			74	
3.	MINUSTAH/ MINUJUSTH	2	9	9	33	24		11	1			89	
4.	UNMIK			14	14	4						32	
5.	UNAMID		11	19	87	182		87	4	4		394	
6.	UNGCI/ UNAMI				9	1						10	
7.	UNIMIT		3	11	35	33		17		1	1	101	
8.	UNFICYP				2	3						5	
9.	UNAMSIL/ UNIPSIL				2							2	
10.	UNMISS			1	13	13		10				37	
11.	UNSOM				1							1	
Total		2	31	72	255	291	1	136	6	5	1	800	

Participation of APF in various UN Peacekeeping Missions

All the Nepali peacekeeping missions are guided by the ethos of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ as the Himalayan country has despatched its soldiers under the blue flag of the United Nations for global peace and security. The Nepali Army, Nepal Police and Armed Police Force strongly believe that peacekeeping adheres to the principle of the UN Charter, non-intervention, sovereign equality and territorial integrity, and peacekeeping should be operated only upon the request of the member states involved in the conflict and are willing to follow the command and control of the United Nations. In the initial days, Nepal participated in the peacekeeping missions to pursue its national interest of expanding its involvement on multilateral fronts. Today, Nepali peacekeepers are stationed in different conflict-ridden regions of the world as one of the top troop contributors in UN peacekeeping from South Asia. Also, all the political parties in Nepal have emphasised the role of Nepali peacekeepers and have realised the importance of Nepal’s contribution through UN peacekeeping on Nepal’s foreign policy maneuverings (Rawal, 2015).

### **Pre-Deployment Trainings**

Whether mission-specific or generic, peacekeeping training, as per the United Nations guidelines, is imparted by the member states’ trainers to all the military and police personnel and units in their home countries before being deployed to a UN mission (Pre-Deployment, 2020). General Assembly resolution A/RES/49/37 (1995) believes that the member states are responsible for imparting pre-deployment training while the Integrated Training Service (ITS) of the United Nations develops training materials and provides guidance to the member states (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2020). All peacekeeping personnel, including the military, police and civilians, need to have essential knowledge through Core Pre-deployment Training Materials (CPTM) to function effectively in the peacekeeping missions. CPTM offers knowledge on the basic principles, guidelines and policies of UN peacekeeping (United Nations Peacekeeping Resource Hub, n.a.).

Initially, selected troops from all the barracks used to be assembled on one spot to receive training about the geography and culture of the host country. But with the increased demand for Nepali Army peacekeepers in conflict-ridden areas, a training institution was established at Panchkhal of Kavre district (Sharma, 2009). Exclusively administered by the officers and men from the Nepal Army, today Nepali peacekeepers are given the required training before their deployment in the UN missions as per the guidelines of the ITS of the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UNDPKO) by the Panchkhal-based training centre, known as the Birendra Peace Operations

*Ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' in Nepal's Contribution to UNPKO 139*

Training Centre (BPOTC) [Nepali Army BPOTC, n.d.). With enough space, resources and instructors, the BPOTC offers pre-deployment training (PDT) and multinational peacekeeping exercise to military observers, military liaison officers, UN peace support operations instructors and staff officers (Sharma, 2009).

Nepali peacekeepers apart, the BPOTC also provides training to peacekeepers from around the globe through its exercise called "SHANTI PRAYAS", which is adopted to encourage global peace and security and enhance the peacekeeping capabilities and skills of countries that are part of the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI). Embracing the ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', Shanti Prayas is intended to provide pre-deployment training and impart skills to the UN partner countries' defense personnel mandated to carry out real-world peacekeeping missions (USINDOPACOM, 2017). Shanti Prayas also includes Regional Training Seminar (RTS), Staff Training Event (STE), Field Training Event (FTE) and Critical Enabler and Capability Enhancement (2CE). It has so far trained 1,135 personnel from Nepal, the US, GPOI, non-GPOI and friendly countries (Nepali Army BPOTC, n.d.). The objective of Shanti Prayas is to have the peacekeepers internalise the importance of military police and significance of basic medical care, and adopt counter IED (Improvised Explosive Device) and EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) skills, along with basic understanding of military command, control, communication and intelligence (C3I) during peacekeeping missions (Behlin, 2017). Apart from military and physical training, the Nepal Army also attends various workshops, conferences and seminars organised by the United Nations and several institutions, including the ICRC and UNHCR, to strengthen its understanding of human rights and democratic values. ICRC has also imparted knowledge on the Law of Armed Conflict to the peacekeepers prior to their missions.

Protecting civilians and guaranteeing the safe delivery of aid and assistance to the vulnerable population are also the responsibility of the peacekeepers (Behlin, 2017), and realising the same spirit, the Nepal Police has been imparting pre-deployment training to its personnel, working as trainers, investigators, gender officers, logistic officers and mission managers at various command levels (Nepal Police, 2012). Today, the BPOTC has also started integrating police personnel in pre-deployment training, with the objective of meeting contemporary challenges in peacekeeping missions. Such training brings Formed Police Units (FPUs) of the Armed Police Force and Nepal Police personnel together at the BPOTC for two weeks before their deployment (Peace Operations Training Institute, 2018). A UN Division has

been established within the Nepal Police to vitalise the role of the Nepal Police in the United Nations. And to make the UN peacekeeping operations easier, more efficient and scientific, the work has been divided among the UNPOL Desk, FPU Desk and Administrative Office (Bhattarai, 2013). In the same way, the Armed Police Force has also developed special pre-deployment training courses and operational environment familiarisation for its personnel for intricate peacekeeping missions. The courses are designed realising the need on the ground by accommodating the experiences and lessons shared by former mission returnees and on the commitment to the UN Charter and peacekeeping guidelines (Armed Police Force, 2017). Earmarking of contingents and personnel for the missions is supervised by the Deputy Inspector General at the Department of Human Resource Development, which is headed by an Additional Inspector General (Armed Police Force, 2017). Also, to make Nepali peacekeeping more responsible, accountable and inclusive, Nepal has been deploying National Investigation Officers, including women, since March 2016 in each of the peacekeeping missions where Nepali peacekeepers are deployed. The battalions also have a gender officer (Bairagi, 2017) to make them gender-balanced (The Himalayan Times, 2014). All these details indicate Nepal's preparedness in enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of UN peace operations in maintaining global peace and security by upholding the ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (The Himalayan Times, 2019). Despite such rigorous training, peacekeepers fall prey to hostile environments, particularly due to lack of required logistics and swift response and monitoring mechanisms (Nakarmi, 2018). Over 37,000 peacekeepers have lost their lives since the first peacekeeping mission started, among them 76 are Nepalis.

### **Nepal's Image Abroad**

Nepal's contribution in UN peacekeeping has extensively enhanced Nepal's image abroad as a stern believer in collective security. Many Nepali peacekeepers have been awarded and eulogised for their bravery, discipline and sincerity in maintaining stability, peace and security in the conflict-ridden and post-conflict societies (UN Peacekeeping, 2020). Nepal's peacekeeping is also favoured for its neutrality and impartiality (Newar, 2004). But when we are discussing Nepal's applauded role in peacekeeping, we also cannot brush aside reports that have generated distrust and suspicion over Nepal's peacekeeping operations, eventually tarnishing Nepal's image abroad. In April 2018, Nepali peacekeepers deployed in South Sudan reportedly faced allegations of child rape (South China Morning Post, 2018). The UN

### *Ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' in Nepal's Contribution to UNPKO 141*

spokesperson described the case as 'heinous' (The Himalayan Times, 2018). In 2018, there were about 1,747 Nepali Blue Helmets deployed in South Sudan to help contain the civil war (The Kathmandu Post, 2018). Also, in October of 2010, Nepali peacekeepers were accused of having started a devastating cholera epidemic in Haiti, which killed almost 9,000 people (The Kathmandu Post, 2018). A cholera epidemic was underway in Nepal in 2001, and the sewage from the latrines at the UN troops' camp in Haiti was said to have leaked into the adjacent river, which took the form of an epidemic (Miroff, 2016). Also, in 2005, six Nepali peacekeeping soldiers were jailed for sexual abuse in Congo. They were sentenced to three months in prison "when a general court martial found them guilty of sexual abuses" (Aljazeera, 2005). It was reported that "young children were bribed with eggs, milk or a few dollars for sex" (Aljazeera, 2005). Such unlawful and immoral activities performed by Nepali peacekeepers have not only tarnished Nepal's image abroad but also jeopardised the ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (The Himalayan Times, 2019), upon which Nepal has always relied to promote world peace and regional harmony, particularly through the policy of neutrality and non-alignment.

#### **Discussion**

UN peacekeeping missions have been at the heart of Nepal's foreign policy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. Nepal's contribution in UN peacekeeping has helped Nepal to project an image of an internationalist in world politics. Nepal's election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council twice, in 1969-70 and 1988-89, is also believed to have been reinforced by its peacekeeping contributions (Khand, 2009). Nepal's contribution in peacekeeping has always been helpful in protecting and strengthening its sovereignty and independence (Maskey, 1996). Nepal's resolute and untiring adherence to world peace and the UN Charter, in particular, is discernible in Nepal's unflinching participation in the UNPKOs. Communication between the Nepal Government and the United Nations is facilitated by Nepal's Permanent Mission stationed in New York, who is advised by an army liaison officer on peacekeeping operations. As soon as the permanent mission forwards a request from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) under the United Nations to the Kathmandu-based Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with a carbon copy despatched to the Nepali Army, Armed Police Force and Nepal Police, the respective units and divisions kick-start their preparations (Bhattarai, 2013). The Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Home Affairs are appropriately consulted as per the nature of the request.

Nepal's neutrality has always been lauded when it comes to peacekeeping in areas where the warring parties are driven by two conflicting principles or religious ideologies, especially in the Israel-Palestine conflict. In such conflicts, the international community shows interest in Nepal as it is a non-Muslim state and can remain perfectly neutral. Israel never accepts troops from Muslim countries upon suspicion that there might be sympathisers of the Islamic militants (Newar, 2004). Nepal's neutrality in peacekeeping missions is the offshoot of its firm belief in the UN Charter, non-intervention and also as an original member of the Non-Aligned Movement, which wholly strengthened Nepal's foreign policy of world peace, triggered by the philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', even during the Cold War period. Because, while the rivalry between the United States and USSR was underway during the Cold War period, Nepal was one of the few countries to contribute troops to the United Nations (Bhattarai, 2013). Nepal also remained as a troop contributor to the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) in the State of Jammu and Kashmir in 1948 (Bhattarai, 2013). Since then, all successive regimes and governments have perceived the regular contribution to the UN peacekeeping missions as an instrument to elevate Nepal's global profile, and as a mechanism to boost Nepal's internationalist approach (Thapa, 1995). Nepal at present is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest troop contributor to the UN peacekeeping operations (Nepali Army, n.d.). As of September 20, 2020, more than 5,000 Nepali peacekeepers are deployed across dozens of missions around the globe (Nepali Army, n.d.). Nepal has also signed a MoU under the UN Standby Arrangements System to contribute, at short notice, 5,000 troops, including doctors, engineers, observers and headquarters staff and civilian police monitors, for peacekeeping purposes (UN Press Release, 1998).

Nepal is equally committed to providing up to 10,000 peacekeepers at the request of the UN (Nepali Army BPOTC, n.d.). Today, Nepal sends military and police personnel to Africa, Europe, the Middle East, South, South-East Asia and the Caribbean upon the call of the UN (Nepali Army BPOTC, n.d.). Since 1958, Nepal has participated in 44 UN missions, in which more than 129,890 personnel have participated, and more than 70 peacekeepers from Nepal have sacrificed their lives while more than 70 have been disabled for the noble cause of international peace and security (UN News, 2020). Nepali peacekeepers have also received senior appointments at the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and as Force Commanders and have been deployed in various military contingents as military observers and staff officers. Recently, Ishwar Hamal, Major General of the Nepali Army, was designated as the Force

*Ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' in Nepal's Contribution to UNPKO 143*

Commander of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Golan Heights (United Nations Secretary General, 2020). During the Cold War period, Nepal also led the Commission of Investigation into the Conditions and Circumstances resulting in the tragic death of then Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold, who was killed in a plane crash at Ndola in Lusaka in 1961 (Bhusal & Parajuli, 2017). In 1969-70 and 1988-89, Nepal was elected a non-permanent member of the UNSC (Khand, 2009). When the United Nations was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1988, Ratna Gurung of the Nepali Army was also included in the Secretary-General's official entourage that visited Oslo to receive the Prize. This is recognition of Nepal's contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security (Bhusal & Parajuli, 2017) by upholding the ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. Nepal also served as an organising committee member of the UN Peace Building Commission for 2008/2009 in the category of troop-contributing countries for its contribution to peacekeeping (Rawal, 2015). Exercising its niche diplomacy, Nepal has also contributed to UN Peacekeeping Operations by providing engineers, medical teams and Special Forces contingents (Nepali Army BPOTC, n.d.).

The fundamental objective of Nepal's foreign policy is to conduct an independent foreign policy based on the Charter of the United Nations, non-alignment, principles of Panchsheel, international law and the norms of world peace (Article 51 of Nepal's Constitution) (MoFA, n.d.), and Nepal's contribution to UN peacekeeping fulfills that principle significantly. Nepal's biggest contribution to the UN peacekeeping operation is in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) (Bhusal & Parajuli, 2017). Nepal is one of the 45 troop-contributing countries of UNIFIL since 1978, with 870 peacekeepers serving to maintain peace in this region by observing, monitoring and reporting the security situation on the ground (UNIFIL, 2020). The Nepali peacekeepers serving in different missions, including South Sudan, Lebanon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti and others, are awarded UN medals (Gebrselassie, 2017). The quality of service provided by the Nepali troops in various missions has been lauded and praised by the UN. Nepali Army's Mahendra Dal Battalion was awarded the "Best Battalion Honour" for its effective delivery in Burundi (Armed Police Force, n.d.). Nepali peacekeepers so far have not faced any objection from the host government because of their dedication, bravery, neutrality, integrity and professionalism. Apart from this, Nepal's long, active and successful involvement in the UNPKO has also resulted in the professional and personal development of Nepali soldiers and contributed to the socio-

economic development of Nepal (Rawal, 2015). Financial support received from peacekeeping is higher than the standard salary given in Nepal, which keeps the soldiers motivated or propelled and makes them more committed (International Crisis Group, 2010). Most of the Nepali soldiers at least once in their military tenure get to serve in peacekeeping showing international loyalty. UN allowance and remittance are an important source of the Nepali Army's welfare fund, which supports different welfare programmes-medical, educational facilities and humanitarian support to veterans and their families (Bhattarai, 2013). But at times, UN missions serve as an internal patronage system, providing an opportunity for the top brass to reward or punish officers by granting or denying missions (International Crisis Group, 2010). However, it cannot be denied that peacekeeping provides Nepali soldiers the opportunity to experience and advance their operational and organisational skills. The regular participation of the Nepali Army, Nepal Police and Armed Police Force in UN peacekeeping has helped peacekeepers better understand the universal values and norms of human rights, the importance of the rule of law and significance of professionalism (Bhattarai, 2013), which ultimately reinforces the spirit of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'.

Still, Nepali peacekeeping faces several challenges in pragmatically realising the ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. The absence of a coherent and clear approach by the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Foreign Affairs in managing peacekeeping efforts and the government's reluctance to arrange and administer peacekeeping exercises are major constraints confronting all the security institutions of Nepal together with logistics, administration and management difficulties (Bhattarai, 2013). Besides the ineffectual handling while selecting, training, equipping, anticipating and maintaining peacekeepers in the conflict zones, failure to illustrate the alluring competence of civilian and military institutions, mismanagement of welfare funds, diplomatic incompetency and lack of advantageous relationship between the military and civilians about peacekeeping involvement have constrained Nepali peacekeeping performance (Rawal, 2015). Equally there are challenges in getting acculturated to the local culture and population and coordinating with the police and humanitarian components of peacekeeping missions (Bhattarai, 2013). Also, handling of transnational crimes, sexual abuse and violation of human rights poses challenge to the peacekeepers (International Crisis Group, 2010). These impediments may have long-term implications for Nepal's image in the international community if they remain unresolved.

## **Conclusion**

This study has reached an understanding that in order to make Nepal's foreign policy objectives of world peace and international law and its abiding faith in the United Nations charter widely detectable to the international community through the ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', Nepal should come up with a long-term strategy and vision regarding peacekeeping, such as specific policy guidelines, improved logistics, effective training systems, improved diplomatic capabilities, transparent selection criteria that are compatible with international standards and increased government's involvement in peacekeeping. It is also important to have perpetual coordination among the line ministries, including the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Finance in developing policy in line with the UN's peacekeeping guidelines.

Besides political commitment, which is a prerequisite for effective peacekeeping operations, improving the operational readiness of the peacekeepers before deployment is essential. In the Nepali context, in areas where the Nepali Army, Nepal Police and Nepal Armed Police Force are being deployed, an integrated performance policy framework would be beneficial for effective peacekeeping and to realise the spirit of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' by increasing the number of civilians in peacekeeping, and by implementing the principle of gender parity for multidimensional peacekeeping. Also, there is a prospect for Nepal to strengthen its institutional capacity and develop itself as a regional centre for peacekeeping training.

This analytical research has also realised that Nepal's participation in peacekeeping remains unimpeded and unvarying despite numerous political transformations back home. Different political parties, political regimes and governments, regardless of their ideological divergences, have embraced the ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' and Nepal's foreign policy objective of world peace and harmony. Participation of all the security bodies in the peacekeeping mission, too, displays Nepal's unflinching adherence to the maintenance of international peace and security. Acknowledging the fact that every peacekeeping is driven by a specific set of mandates, Nepal is motivated by the shared objectives to eliminate human sufferings and restore socio-economic conditions and revive institutions for self-sustaining peace.

To realise the spirit of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' by exercising the foreign policy objective of world peace, the Government of Nepal has always promoted the participation of the Nepali Army, Nepal Police and Armed Police Force in the UNPKOs, as mandated by the United Nations, through its permanent

mission in New York. Because, as this research reiterates, too, the participation of the Nepali security forces in the UNPKOs is an extension of Nepal's foreign policy on world peace, international law and the UN Charter. For the successful implementation of the philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' through the UNPKOs, the government needs to extend the required support, training facilities and resources to the security forces, empowering them to undertake new missions commendably. Security forces also need to support the mission with adequate UN standard logistics and resources. Refraining from using substandard equipment, arms and logistics in the missions not only helps sustain the reputation of the forces and prevent Nepal's image from being tarnished, but also reinforces the ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'.

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*Ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' in Nepal's Contribution to UNPKO 147*

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# NEPAL'S POST-PANDEMIC DIPLOMACY

■ John Narayan Parajuli

## Abstract

*The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of prioritising health and other social and environmental issues and treating them as national security concerns. Taking a small state policy capacity approach—a small state's ability to make informed policy decisions, this article looks at the nascent efforts being made to pursue regional cooperation in dealing with non-conventional threats in South Asia; and both implications and opportunities for Nepal to diversify its diplomatic engagement with a view to bridging its own domestic capacity gap-heightened by the pandemic. This analytical article argues that this is the right time for Nepal to reframe the issue of health and other emergencies, recalibrate the roles of its domestic institutions and diversify its diplomacy with the regional players and pivotal middle powers for building domestic capacity.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19 Pandemic, Non-traditional Threats, Nepal, Foreign Policy, Small State, Policy Capacity.

## Introduction

COVID-19 has thrown the spectre of existential crisis, particularly for the poorer and smaller states with weak health infrastructures (BBC, 2020), underscoring the importance of securitising infectious diseases control mechanisms through adequate allocation of resources. This pandemic is likely to reflect in every country the adequacy, or lack thereof, of the existing domestic response mechanisms. For the developed countries, it is a matter of putting in place systems and ensuring adequate resources to the frontline agencies. For poorer countries, the task is taller and would invariably require support from other countries (Berglöf et al., 2020). But as the pandemic spreads against the backdrop of an intensifying cold war, the choices are not straight forward. For countries like Nepal that are caught in big power rivalry, deepening ties with the regional players and middle powers while also engaging with the big powers may be a more acceptable proposition and attractive balancing tool. This is important in light of the vaccine diplomacy or rivalry, however one characterises it, coming into play (Wesley, 2020). For Nepal, both the internal

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reflection and emphasis on regional and global cooperation must be an integral part of the adaptation process. The country's need to build domestic capacity and recalibrate the response mechanism is particularly evident, and addressing these gaps will be critical for successfully dealing with future outbreaks.

There are clearly two interconnected parts to the pandemic response. The first step is to get the domestic response and coordination right, which means identifying the gaps in domestic systems and processes, and ensuring availability of resources, including technical capacity and personnel. The second equally important aspect is to build the external outreach with a view to securing support for pandemic response. This article revisits Nepal's foreign policy towards the regional players and middle powers (also referred to as secondary powers in this article), particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic. Taking a small state's capacity approach and drawing on the literature around non-conventional security threats, this study argues that there is an absence of strategic coherence in Nepal's diplomacy towards secondary powers in international politics.

This study first takes stock of the existing literature on small state capacity and then looks at the COVID-19 regional diplomacy. It subsequently offers an overview of the state of Nepal's bilateral relations with select countries to highlight the lack of strategic coherence in Nepal's diplomacy. Finally, this article makes an argument for diversifying and deepening relations with the regional players and middle powers to build domestic capacity.

### **Small State Policy Capacity**

Small states have capacity constraints in terms of what they can achieve both internally and externally. They often must deal with a 'naturally imposed and predictable condition' in which room for flexibility is strictly inhibited (Cooper & Shaw, 2009, p. xviii). Devising a coherent strategy that is a 'goal-oriented, higher order policy' is beyond the 'intellectual and bureaucratic capacities' of small states (Jenne, 2020, p.111). Yet there are plenty of examples of small countries punching above their weight by taking unconventional approaches to diplomacy. Malta has leveraged its passports, and Qatar has taken 'extraordinary risks to promote active international diplomacy' (Cooper & Shaw, 2009). Between the 1950s and 90s, Nepal's effort to play an outsize role in the UN system through contributions to the peacekeeping missions and the proposal to declare Nepal a 'Zone of Peace' were examples of outside-the-box thinking. But Nepal's state capacity has not kept up with the pace of globalisation and technological development.

The literature on small states is 'overly state-centric' despite evidence of the role and influences of other actors. There is a clear need to pay attention to the

'roles of national and global civil societies, private companies and other diverse and competitive actors'. Each of these actors 'amplify the opportunities and risks that influence the behaviour of small states' (Cooper & Shaw, 2009, p.8). Since 2010, there has been growing recognition among small states that human resources are important aspects in this era of globalisation. This is evident in the way some developmental island states, 'from Malta to Singapore and Mauritius to Bermuda and Caymans', have approached the issue of capacity. This approach relies on the 'role of diasporas in terms of technology transfer and policy development' (Dawson, 2007 p.15).

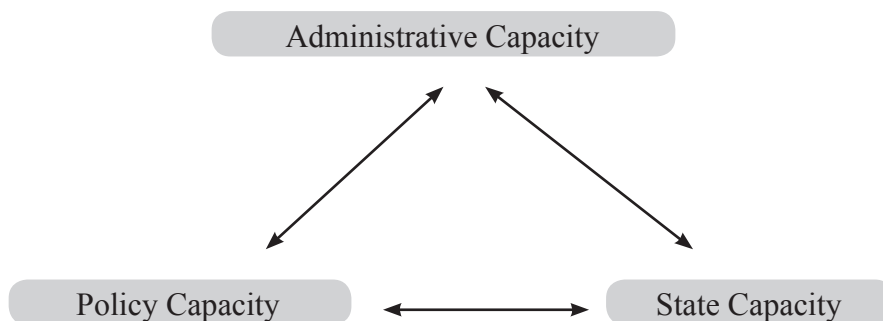
Baldacchino (2009) argues that small states are the norm; in contrast, large states are 'quirks and anomalies' (p.23). In a conflict between a small and a large state, often the smaller state tends to get more concessions as 'large states do not want to be seen to be bullying smaller states, unless that smaller state can be convincingly depicted as harbouring communists, terrorists or other reprehensible categories' (p.28). Prasad (2009) points out that 'small states are able to use their sovereignty and political status, rather than their economic influence, to advance their cause-often using non-market solutions or non-orthodox approaches' (p.43). Small states may be dependent on other large states and donors, yet they have developed 'ingenious systems to overcome the difficulties posed by their smallness' (p.60). Baldacchino and Milne (2000) go on to liken small states to 'modern day pirates', always on the lookout for 'exceptions, loopholes, special arrangements and derogations in the world systems'.

Thorhallsson (2009) argues states can 'choose their own size' by how they decide to act on the international stage. For example, Iceland, in the mid-to late 1990s, decided to punch above its weight by seeking to play a visible role in the UN system, NATO and other multilateral organisations (p.138). During the Doha round of the WTO negotiations in 2005, four small African countries, namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali, had remarkable success and were able to force the larger countries to change the text of the trade agreement (Lee, 2009, p.195). "By raising their own collective game in the WTO and encouraging other groups to support their demands, they have shifted from being mere objects of trade talks to being subjects in the trade negotiations" (p.197).

The above examples underscore the fact that policy capacity of the small states is not always lacking-where there is a strong domestic will to create a niche. Policy capacity is defined as the 'ability to marshal the necessary resources to make intelligent collective choices and set strategic directions' (Painter & Pierre, 2005, p.2). Policy capacity has strong correlation with state and administrative capacity. "Administrative capacity refers to the ability to manage efficiently the human and physical resources required for

delivering the outputs of government, while state capacity is a measure of the state's ability to mobilise social and economic support and consent for the achievement of public goals" (p.2). These 'three concepts are analytically distinct but interdependent components of governing capacity' and can be best illustrated in the 'form of a triangle' (p.3).

Capacity Triangle



Where small countries lack domestic policy capacity, it is logical for them to 'piggy-back', in the case of small EU states, on transnational organisations (p.40). There are many examples of countries developing their domestic capacity through agreements and exchanges with other countries, including under the banner of South-South and North-South Cooperation. A crisis such as the pandemic can create perfect opportunities for small countries to influence the behaviours of larger states, regional bodies and international organisations while 'piggy-backing' on the expertise and resources of competent states to build their own domestic policy capacity.

### **Regional Diplomacy**

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiative for a South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) video conference on instituting a regional response to the pandemic came as a bold gesture, yet it was short-lived. As the domestic challenges became paramount, regionalism was put on the backburner, and the move by and large remained just that: a gesture (Kugelman, 2020). During the video conference, countries agreed to create a SAARC COVID Response Fund, but it may be sometime before anything more meaningful and actionable flows from the initial video conference. Because the spread of the virus was so quick and overwhelming, countries have not had the time to formulate a clear national strategy, let alone one for regional cooperation. Ideas for instituting a regional response mechanism with teeth may only emerge after governments in the region contain the first wave of this pandemic, which has strained both the capacity and resources in almost

all countries. With economic activity on a standstill for months, few countries can spare resources. But once countries can document lessons from their own national response and its effectiveness or lack thereof, a framework of regional response may appear from the reflective process. But smaller countries like Nepal will have to play a much more active role in nudging the larger countries to commit to a regional framework.

Despite severely constrained national capacities, some bilateralism and multilateralism have been on display even without a regional framework, as India, the US, China and other countries lent a helping hand to Nepal. But as the rivalry over vaccine development heats up, the already complex geopolitics is getting further compounded (Kitney, 2020)-seeking to constrain the ability of countries like Nepal to independently decide on which vaccine to purchase-offering a flavour of the geopolitical entanglements Nepal could find itself in the post-pandemic period. If not handled properly, this evolving cold war will seek to further limit Nepal's degree of autonomy in conducting its foreign policy. Unlike the previous cold war, this is being fought in Nepal's own neighbourhood, and, hence, the ramifications of miscalculation or perceived slight are that much higher. Yet the pandemic and the geopolitical undercurrent also open doors for creative out-of-the-box thinking in pursuit of Nepal's national interests. Nepal, as the current Chair of SAARC and as a country with good relations with all the member states, has the ability to influence the behaviour of larger states towards shaping a regional response to the pandemic.

### **Overview of Nepal's Bilateral Relations**

Out of 193 UN member states, Nepal has bilateral relations with over 167 countries and the Holy See (MoFA, n.d.a). Nepal's external engagement seeks to 'enhance dignity of the nation by safeguarding sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, and promoting economic well-being and prosperity of Nepal. It is also aimed at contributing to global peace, harmony and security'(MoFA, n.d.b).But is there strategic coherence in terms of achieving these goals? Have these goals been translated into an actionable programme of actions? While there have been attempts to push for economic diplomacy (MoFA, 2019), the lack of brainstorming on targeted approaches in dealing with each country, and the general tendency to see all countries as donors, has perpetuated a rich donor-poor recipient mindset. In practical terms, what this has resulted in is a supply-driven rather than demand-driven development assistance framework.

This select snapshot of the state of bilateral relations with a mix of big powers and regional players below captures the ad-hocism at the individual level in the conduct of our foreign policy.

Prior to the lockdown, Nepal and China had entered a phase of accelerated connectivity with the opening of new border crossings, upgradation of roads and facilities leading up to the borders and burgeoning engagement over cross-border railways and transmission lines. This is likely to be affected in the aftermath of the crisis. The extent of how the disruption will play out remains to be seen, but for starters, the massive shortfall in revenue as a result of economic contraction is certain to affect funding for the flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Boo, David, & Simpfendorfer, 2020). BRI, as Chinese experts point out, is a trade programme (Republic, 2020), not an aid programme. Hence, our overreliance on China for implementing national development priorities without assessing the financial viability of such projects is problematic.

Bilateral relationships between Nepal and India have gone through a rollercoaster during the tenure of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The recent dispute over Nepal's western borders (MoFA, 2020) against the backdrop of escalating tensions between India and China over Ladakh has generated misleading narratives in the Indian media about Kathmandu taking orders from Beijing. Such a perception can have far-reaching repercussions in bilateral relations.

Nepali officials and strategic thinkers have long complained about India's neglect of its neighbourhood, particularly during the Manmohan Singh administration (Ghosh, 2014). That changed for the better in the first year of Modi's tenure, yet it resulted in a border blockade in the second year of the Modi administration. The 2015 blockade (Dixit, 2015), though harsh, came as a blessing in disguise for Nepal as it forced Kathmandu to seek ways to diversify its trade dependence-which culminated in Nepal signing a transportation and transit agreement (Giri, 2019), including importing petroleum products, with Beijing. New Delhi's punitive action against Kathmandu for ignoring its advice in the drafting of Nepal's constitution created a rare moment of strategic autonomy for Nepal that led to the Himalayan state formally joining Beijing's flagship BRI (Parajuli, 2018). Nepal joining the BRI may have come out of desperation, but this created an exceptional space for the country to push its foreign policy envelope. The reflections from this pandemic should trigger a similar response for Kathmandu to look beyond the big powers and diversify relations with other countries, albeit without the high-stake political brinkmanship.

Capturing the nuances in the bilateral relationship between Nepal and the United States requires a much more in-depth discussion, but, suffice to say, for this article that they have been mostly cordial (MoFA, n.d.c), except for some bilateral irritants. Geopolitics and rivalry between the US and China have delayed and complicated the implementation of the Millennium Corporation Challenge (MCC) in Nepal (Jha, 2020).

Nepal and Bangladesh have seen renewed engagement in the last few years, and trade between the two countries is on the rise. Bangladesh has also shown considerable interest in importing power from Nepal, and a memorandum of understanding (MoU) has been signed to this effect (The Kathmandu Post, 2018). There is strong potential for the two countries to enter a more strategic relationship given the many areas of common interest.

Nepal-UK relations have seen their ups and downs. While the UK remains a key development partner (MoFA, n.d.d), the lack of strategic focus in Kathmandu has meant that Nepal has not been able to leverage the over 200-year-old association to its maximum. The UK may not be a major power it used to be, but there is considerable room for a much more substantive bilateral relationship that goes beyond the mere traditional donor-recipient dynamic.

Nepal-Japan relationship remains cordial as Tokyo is a strong supporter of Nepal's development efforts (Embassy of Japan, n.d.). Although there have been several high-level visit exchanges, Nepal has missed opportunities to elevate the ties to much more strategic levels. In 2011, in the aftermath of Japan's earthquake and tsunami, as the country was looking for partners to secure its food supply, Nepal was approached to allocate space in the Dang Valley. "In early 2011, .... our bureaucracy sat on a request from Japan that would have created a potential export industry. In the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami in March 2011, Japan faced severe shortages of food supplies as the twin disasters caused disruptions to its supply chains" (Parajuli, 2019b).

Even though the EU continues to provide significant development and humanitarian assistance to Nepal, the ties are far from cordial. This is partly due to Nepal's neglect. The Europeans want a much deeper engagement with Kathmandu than currently exists. In fact, EU officials have openly called for a 'political partnership' between Nepal and the EU (Ghimire, 2019). The relationship with the EU, in general, and Germany and Scandinavian countries, in particular, has been overlooked by Kathmandu. They deserve to be given much more importance. That is a significant missed opportunity in

terms of pursuing Nepal's grand strategy of security and prosperity. Regional players and pivotal middle powers-such as Japan, Australia, South Korea, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Israel, among others-have the capability of not only complementing the assistance of other big powers but also becoming a source of improving domestic capacity in Nepal. It is imperative that Nepal cast a wider net and use bilateral relations to build its own national capacity for future pandemic response and development as well as economic opportunities.

### **Implications for Nepal**

The pandemic's implications for Nepal are far reaching. It has highlighted just how devastating the social divide can be during pandemics that demand strict social distancing. Millions of people have lost their livelihoods. The economic ruin this pandemic promises to leave behind is even worse. The economy is expected to contract significantly as remittances, tourism and service sectors-the key pillars of the economy-come to a standstill and are unlikely to bounce back to pre-pandemic levels anytime soon. The state of the economy is in a similar shape across the region, and if the countries are to contain the virus and jumpstart their economies, some level of regional cooperation is imperative. Nepal, as the current Chair of SAARC, is in a position to convene regional meetings to deliberate on the modalities of regional cooperation.

The World Bank revised its forecast for Nepal and stated that the growth rate would fall to a "range between 1.5 and 2.8 per cent in FY 2020, reflecting lower remittances, trade, tourism and broader disruptions caused by the COVID-19 outbreak". The Bank expects the contraction to remain in FY 2021 with only some recovery in 2021. While the overall poverty headcount had declined to 8 per cent (\$1.90), the Bank estimates that 31.2 per cent of the people in Nepal live between \$1.9 and \$3.2 a day. This section of the population faces a heightened risk of "falling into extreme poverty, primarily because of reduced remittances, foregone earnings of potential migrants, job losses in the informal sector and rising prices for essential commodities as a result of COVID-19" (Nepal Overview, 2020). Again, these forecasts are not very different from those of other countries in the region.

The global shortfall in revenue both in the public and private sector, which is estimated to be around \$12 trillion (Jensen et al., 2020), will have a knock-on effect on Official Development Assistance and Foreign Direct Investment in Nepal. Meanwhile, Nepal's internal revenue collection has also dropped significantly (Shrestha, 2020). The government is also under pressure to provide a bailout package for the private sector. With increased financial demand and reduction in revenue collection, there have been calls to trim the government machinery and do away with the many commissions, committees and advisors. This is likely to have some effect on the government structure

and the decision-making process. With the need for strong health surveillance becoming imperative, there is fear that this will lead to erosion in certain civil liberties. Security forces will be an integral part of pandemic prevention going forward. This is in line with the global trend (Trenkov-Wermuth, 2020). Armies have been called to help civilian administrations in many countries. In Nepal, even the procurement of medical equipment has been assigned to the Nepali Army. In addition, the Armed Police Force (APF) and the Nepali Army, along with the Nepal Police, have been tasked to build quarantine facilities.

But if Nepal is to be ready for another pandemic, these calibrations of domestic institutions need to go further. Protecting public health clearly should be a part of the broader civil-defense strategy, with clearly defined roles for the public health apparatuses, civil administration and security forces. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) must be put in place with strict protocols for different government and security entities to follow in the event of an outbreak. In addition, a gap analysis needs to be conducted to identify both capacity and resource gaps while putting in place a system to minimise external dependence on critical equipment and drugs. This may mean either state-owned enterprises producing them or the private sector producing with state support. Both the APF and the Army should increase their capacity to rapidly construct field hospitals. This requires more specialised medical staff, engineers and medics within their ranks. Given Nepal's neighbourhood and the size of the militaries of neighbouring countries, our armed forces may need to revisit their organisational structure and allocation of resources to tackle pandemics and other natural calamities. Personnel from specialised units of the Army, APF and Police should complement the National Disaster Management Agency and subsequent line agencies in the provincial and local levels.

This pandemic calls for a comprehensive national security strategy that needs to not just provide intellectual architecture to tackle traditional security threats but, going further, also include non-traditional threats, such as pandemics and climate change. The Army and security forces are being called on a regular basis to help, and so a revised policy built on the foundation of added strategic coherence can make the task flow with greater efficiency. Security is about survival, and yet the narrow focus on the traditional security dilemma without factoring in the emerging issues that threaten human security is problematic. As the pandemic has shown, issues that are outside the domain of the traditional security agenda can throw a spectre of existential crisis. Securitising health or according priority akin to national security threats, is not a call for handing over responsibilities to the military apparatus but rather ensuring that such a potent issue receive the priority it deserves. "Security is a move that takes politics beyond the established rule of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics" (Buzan et al, 1998, p.23).

Internally, Nepal's security forces have been an essential part of the pandemic response (The Rising Nepal, 2020 a). This needs to be recognised and further strengthened through a variety of legal and institutional measures as a part of a broader civil-defense strategy with clearly defined roles for the public health apparatuses, civil administration and security forces. There is strong intellectual argument for widening the debate on security beyond just the traditional issues (Ullman, 1983; Jahn, Lemaitre, and Waever, 1987; Nye and Lynn-Jones, 1988; Matthews, 1989; Brown, 1989; Crawford, 1991; and Waever et al., 1993). Clearly, this pandemic, in line with the securitisation theory put forward by Buzan, Waever and De Wilde in their 1998 seminal book (*Security: A New Framework for Analysis*), calls for a comprehensive national security strategy for dealing with non-traditional threats, such as pandemics and climate change. In order to implement such a strategy, a great deal of expertise and resources need to be made available. This is precisely where deepening and diversifying Nepal's foreign policy engagement with the regional players and pivotal middle powers can come into play. There is huge potential for further leveraging Nepal's existing relations with the EU, the UK, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, Israel, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, among others, for building its domestic capacity aimed at providing better response to citizens and residents during crises and disasters.

The Nepali Army and the security establishment need to be realistic about assessing Nepal's threat environment. Given the power asymmetrical neighbourhood that we live in, it should provoke our strategic thinkers into revisiting the strategic focus and composition of the security forces. "Recognising the military's role in relief and humanitarian activities in response to disasters and the increased possibility of climate-related disasters, it is vital that the armed forces in the region conduct re-assessments of their capabilities in various response scenarios and develop revamped Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for adapting to climate change. This should also include a situation when national forces are asked to engage in international humanitarian operations" (Karin, 2013, p. 3). This can begin by the government revisiting the Nepali Army's roles and responsibilities-in light of the pandemic and recurring natural calamities. It is critical that the government articulate policy goals for the use of the military and put in place guiding doctrines linked to national priorities, including strategic development works, disaster management and mitigation and counterterrorism. Much of these renewed priorities can be implemented by building strong partnerships with foreign partners, particularly with secondary powers.

To be fair, the Army and the APF already perform several non-traditional roles, including protection of parks, customs, revenue, industrial security and

anti-poaching surveillance. With the right strategy and adequate resources, both the Army and the APF can be model military organisations in the region, ones that are fit for tackling these unconventional threats. As the frequency of these unorthodox security threats increases, it may not be far-fetched to think that Nepal's security forces could even be called to assist at the regional level-serving pretty much the same functions as peacekeepers. Again, given Nepal's neutral position, that is not an improbable proposition.

Undoubtedly, there will be some protests towards the attempt to securitise public health, but without elevating pandemics to the level of national security threats, there simply would not be an adequate structure (Monaco, 2020) and resources available to tackle the crisis with the iron discipline as would be required-more so for poorer countries with weaker health systems. As is evident from what has happened in the United States and other developed countries, simply having the capacity and awareness alone does not cut it. Unless there is a clear structure in place with trigger mechanisms, systems will not kick in. As a result, there will be commotion instead of coherence, wasting valuable time in red tape and demagoguery, and resulting in high fatalities and systems being overwhelmed. The civilian set-up often does not provide ideal conditions for implementing a response in a war-like situation. Therefore, as researchers have noted, 'certain characteristics of the armed forces' make them perfect for pandemic response: "crisis management capabilities, rapid mobility, and immediate availability of trained personnel throughout... They are task-oriented-acting towards defined goals, and practiced at multitasking under difficult conditions" (Kohn et al., 2010, p. 259).

### **Piggyback**

This section offers some example of some regional and secondary powers with policy capacity that Nepal can piggy-back on to bridge its own domestic capacity gap. Israel's experience and emergency response structure are of relevance to Nepal.

By 2005, the Israeli government had taken steps and put the Ministry of Defense (MoD) "in charge of managing national preparedness and response during advanced phases of a severe influenza pandemic", with the Ministry of Health (MoH) responsible for coordinating medical aspects of the response (Kohn et al., 2010, p. 259). Subsequent pandemic protocols drafted in 2006 have further refined this civilian-defense cooperation guideline by making the MoH fully liable for all the responses up to WHO Alert phases 3 and 4 ("WHO Pandemic Phase Description and Main Actions by Phase", n.d.). The MoD would take charge in phase 5 or 6 if the pandemic posed a threat to national

security or the civilian system is overwhelmed (Kohn et al., 2010, p.260).

While Israel has developed capability in tackling unconventional security threats through a unique blend of civilian-defense cooperation, it must be noted that their current response to the pandemic is far from exemplary. After being hailed as a model, the second phase of Israel's measures has been a 'cautionary tale' to the world (The Times of Israel 2020). But that just goes to show the complex and evolving nature of this virus. Nepal has had cordial relations with the Jewish state going back 60 years, and clearly there is a desire to deepen the engagement on both sides (The Rising Nepal, 2020 b). Israel has offered Nepal technical assistance in many areas, and there clearly is room for leveraging the ties further.

The Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF) is an example of another security organisation that excels in disaster management and response in the Asia-Pacific region (Kato, 2019). As Japan is prone to earthquakes, tsunamis, floods and, recently, even nuclear meltdowns, the SDF is in a capacity to offer both state-of-the-art training and resources to our armed forces. This support for building the capacity to ensure human security during disasters neatly fits into the Japanese foreign policy objective of promoting human security. With the right pitching and strategy, Nepal can tap into this very special bilateral relationship to augment domestic capacities. Nepal-Japan relations have several dimensions, and there is desire on the Japanese side to further deepen engagements (The Himalayan Times, 2019). While successive governments have seen Japan as a friend, Kathmandu's approach is often limited to seeking funding for infrastructure projects with little strategic coherence in the dealings of successive governments.

Nepal's relations with South Korea, another pivotal power, are multi-faceted and deepening. Bilateral trade is growing and so is the volume of Korean tourists and foreign direct investments (MoFA, 2019). Seoul's development assistance to Nepal is also on the rise, and the country is keen to share its experience and technology with Nepal (Khanal et al., 2019). Similarly, there is considerable scope for further strengthening already booming ties with Turkey, Thailand, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. There are many areas of common interests, and while these countries are pursuing their strategic interests in pushing for a deeper relation with Nepal, it clearly takes two to tango. Rather than putting them all in one basket, Kathmandu needs a much more meticulous approach in deepening ties with these above-mentioned countries by examining the strength of each of these countries and relating it to Nepal's needs and areas of common interest. Rather than what is being

offered from the vantage point of these countries, Nepali officials can be more proactive and start sending feelers on what Nepal wants from the bilateral ties with these regional powers. This is where institutions like the Institute of Foreign Affairs can contribute by offering research and policy options on each of these countries to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

A vaccine may provide immunity against this virus, but it would not be the last deadly virus to go on rampage, or the last disaster. With accelerating effects of climate change, more unconventional threats are likely to appear at frequent intervals. It is imperative that an unconventional civilian-defense capability be built to tackle recurring unconventional threats.

### **Nepal's COVID-19 Response**

Nepal's COVID response initially was welcomed as the country took swift measures to lock down the country, but an absence of subsequent proactive actions meant that the time afforded by the lockdown was not properly utilised to put in place systems to minimise risks of transmission when the country gradually opened up (Poudel, 2020). The government took the right decision to integrate the security apparatus with the response, yet instead of clarifying the trigger-points and protocols while delegating the responsibilities, other ministries were forced to play second-fiddle (Sijapati, 2020). Clear capacity gaps emerged in several key areas: management of quarantine facilities (Poudel, 2020b); coordination with neighbouring countries over repatriation of citizens; ability to quickly construct COVID field hospitals; procurement of essential supplies; ability to mobilise and leverage the expertise of NGOs and the private sector.

On managing the quarantine facilities, the private sector and NGOs could have been mobilised throughout the country to assist the local authorities and security forces. These non-governmental sectors have the resources and assets to both build and repurpose the existing facilities for quarantining suspected individuals. This would have prevented some quarantine facilities from becoming potential sources of further infections (Poudel, 2020b). Inadequacy was also seen in terms of coordinating with neighbouring countries, particularly India, in ensuring an orderly repatriation of thousands of Nepalis. Given the porous border, an influx of returning Nepalis in the border areas was to be expected, and yet very little arrangement was put there to help the local authorities deal with the situation (Shrestha, 2020). Again, the non-governmental sector could have been reliable partners in this.

While these above shortcomings are by and large a product of inability to think outside-the-box, two important gaps stood out. Our security forces have

limited medical capacity, including building field hospitals rapidly. The second was related to procurement of emergency supplies. Valuable time was lost during the wrangling on how to quickly procure supplies, and the attendant policy paralysis in general was equally problematic (Bhattarai, 2020). Concern among officials about being potentially dragged into a corruption investigation is understandable, yet one fails to understand why there is no system to have a pre-vetted roster of suppliers for emergency procurement or even an emergency provision to offer no-bid contracts for emergency purchases.

COVID-19 has highlighted the extent of policy capacity gaps in Nepal together with administrative and state capacity. One way to respond to this is to deny the shortcomings; another equally bad response is to accept it as the fate of small states. A more helpful approach is to try to analyse what went wrong and then take the corrective path. It is correct that small states clearly have inherent weaknesses, but to accept them as fate would further erode policy and state capacity-making the state in question further vulnerable to a range of insecurities.

### **Conclusion**

This paper, using a small state policy capacity approach, analysed Nepal's state of bilateral relations with secondary powers, regional diplomacy and policy capacity through the lens of the pandemic response. As discussed above, as a small state, Nepal inherently has capacity gaps, which have been heightened partly by an ineffective response to the pandemic. This paper also outlined how the policy capacity gap in Nepal can be bridged by further diversifying relations with the secondary powers and piggybacking on their expertise.

The spectre of existential crisis thrown by the pandemic to small states like Nepal requires a much more proactive and diversified foreign policy that can help produce domestic policy capacity to deal with future disasters. Nepal's relations with the secondary powers while cordial have tremendous untapped potential. This needs to be leveraged going forward.

Regional players and pivotal middle powers-such as Australia, South Korea, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Israel, among others-have the capability of not only complementing the assistance of other big powers but also becoming a source for improving Nepal's domestic capacity. As examples above highlight, many of these countries have strong state capacity and proven track-record of handling unconventional threats. But there is one little caveat here: without strategic coherence in Nepal's policies, simply lobbying for more aid and assistance will not do the country any good. Instead of building the internal capacity and systems, such an approach will only compound the

existing dependency syndrome in the country-leaving the country ever more vulnerable to external interference.

While much energy has been spent deliberating on the country's political system, it is high time for a similar debate to be held for building the internal capacity-particularly in maximising the potential of the country's armed forces and transforming the existing military organisations into smart and agile units geared towards ensuring human security-while offering more value for money to the taxpayers. Nepali leaders and officials can begin by asking tough questions on the domestic pandemic response and subsequently identify resource and capacity gaps in our domestic institutions. This can take the form of a formal report or an informal brainstorming. This can be complemented by a process of identifying countries that had a generally good response to the virus-and with whom Nepal already has diplomatic relations. A list of countries has been mentioned in the paragraphs above, but there could be more from whom Nepal can benefit.

As a country sandwiched between two big powers, historically Nepal's foreign policy had been dominated by the instinctive balancing act designed for survival. Between the 1950s and 90s, there were efforts to diversify Nepal's relations, and this period was characterised by Kathmandu successfully establishing diplomatic ties with a diverse group of countries (Khanal, 2019, p.99). There was also emphasis on punching above the weight by trying to play a bigger role in the UN system. Hence, Nepal's emergence as one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping missions. The change towards democratic dispensation in the post-90 period and rise of India and China gradually ended that push for diversification-bringing the focus back to the idea of a 'bridge' between India and China. Until the 90s, there were fears about Nepal being 'absorbed' by either of the two neighbours, and hence the diversification and counterbalancing act beyond the neighbourhood and active diplomacy to promote Nepal as a 'Zone of Peace' were an existential necessity. Even though there are 39 Nepali diplomatic missions abroad today, more than ever, the sheer number of Nepali embassies abroad does not necessarily indicate quality of relationship with the secondary powers. This issue goes to the heart of state policy capacity to strategise and formulate coherent foreign policy doctrines.

Getting ready for the next pandemic calls for bold diplomatic ambitions and concrete steps towards more calibration of domestic institutions and systems. A broader civil-defense strategy needs to be put in place to protect civilian lives with clearly defined roles for the public health apparatuses, civil administration and security forces. With a clear strategy and high-level engagement, Nepal

can partner with the regional players and middle powers to build domestic capacity. Concerns about security forces playing an outsized role and undermining the civilian government are likely to follow-and these valid apprehensions can be addressed through a clearly defined trigger system and provisions of accountability. Pandemics warrant the same priority as national security threats as it would help ensure adequate structures and resources to tackle the crisis with iron discipline. There are already best practices to learn from.

Nepal's future security and prosperity depend on the ability and agility of Nepali strategic thinkers and actors to recalibrate the country's grand strategy-a strategy that is realistic about the external and internal threat environment and ambitions about leveraging the country's unique position-within and beyond the immediate neighbourhood. States determine their own size by how they choose to act on the international stage. Nepal, given its population and landmass, is not a small state, yet its influence, or lack thereof, on the international stage, makes it one.

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# NEPAL'S ROLE IN STRENGTHENING SAARC

■ Kamal Dev Bhattarai

## Abstract

*This study seeks to examine the overall efforts undertaken by Nepal to activate the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), particularly after the indefinite postponement of its 19th Summit that was scheduled to take place in Islamabad, Pakistan, on November 9-10, 2016. As a strong proponent of regionalism and regional cooperation, Nepal's position has always been making the regional body vibrant and result-oriented; and Nepal has been relentlessly working for the same since its very inception. Much has been written about SAARC and Nepal, still very little literature is available that sincerely digs out the concrete efforts made by Nepal to strengthen the SAARC process. Therefore, this study tries to fulfill this gap. Additionally, this aims to make policy prescriptions for the revival and strengthening of SAARC. The study consists of both primary and secondary data collected from books, seminar papers, policy briefs and newspapers. It applies both qualitative and quantitative approaches while analysing Nepal's efforts in strengthening the SAARC process.*

**Keywords:** Nepal, SAARC, Regional Cooperation, Summits, India-Pak Standoff

## Introduction:

SAARC was created three-and-a-half decades ago with the common agenda of enhancing regional cooperation and ensuring deeper regional integration for the rapid socio-economic development of the member countries and the region as a whole. In 2007, Afghanistan joined it to become its eighth member. SAARC primarily aims to promote the welfare of South Asians; improve their quality of life; accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development; provide all individuals an opportunity to live in dignity and realise their full potentials; and promote and strengthen collective self-reliance (MOFA, 2017).

Since its very inception, there have been 18 summit-level meetings until 2014. Previously, it used to be held every year, but now it is held every two years on a rotational basis and is attended by the heads of state/government of the

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member states. The track record of the past three and a half decades shows that it has not achieved satisfactory results despite having huge potential for regional cooperation and integration of the South Asian countries.

During the period, SAARC has signed several agreements and memorandums of understanding (MoU), but their implementation remains dismal. 'That is precisely the reason why the member states declared at the 13th SAARC Summit in 2005 that the third decade of SAARC would be a decade for implementation (Rahman, 2011, p.51). Despite the unsatisfactory performance as a multilateral framework for cooperation, SAARC's mere existence continues to provide hope to the people of South Asia for better cooperation in the future (ibid). Even after this declaration, there has not been much progress when it comes to implementing past agreements.

There could be several factors behind the sluggish pace of the regional body, but the chronic Indo-Pak conflict is the dominant reason. Experts are of the view that regional organisations are facing increasing challenges in light of the changing global and regional scenario. The race for 'regionalism' has taken a back gear. "We are not in the 1980s and 1990s, when debate on regionalism was at its zenith. Under these circumstances, the role of the regional organisation, including that of SARRC, has simply disappeared. Nepal as Chair of SAARC is pushing for revival of the SAARC process, but given the intensity of the conflict between India and Pakistan, the chances of such efforts providing any tangible results would be very slim (Bhatta, 2019).

Due to the same reason, the regional body is dysfunctional. From the perspective of international relations, there are various types of regional organisations in terms of their functioning and effectiveness.

SAARC is also being perceived as 'zombie' organization today. Literature on international relations describes three different types of regional and international organisations-alive, dead and zombie. The first refers to organisations that are alive and functioning (Kumar, 2018). The second type consists of those that have died, though this happens rarely. Finally, 'zombie' organisations are those that continue to operate but without making any progress towards their mandates. Zombie organisations maintain "a level of semi-regular operation, but output in terms of progress on their goals falls below expectation. SAARC falls under the zombie organisation because it is in operation but not making any progress in its mandate (ibid).

To push SAARC towards fulfilling its mandate, there should be regular functioning of all mechanisms of the body, including the summit-level meeting, but it is not an easy task. Reviving SAARC as a vibrant organisation is a

challenging job due to the Indo-Pak tension and fast changing geopolitics of the region. Despite such challenges, Nepal as a strong proponent of the regional organisation and founding member is continuously and consistently pushing for the smooth functioning of SAARC because it believes that regionalism serves its national interests. Regarding Nepal's strong belief in regionalism, Foreign Minister Pradeep Kumar Gyawali (2019) said:

“We believe in regionalism as a vehicle for trade and economic growth. Last year, we successfully hosted the fourth BIMSTEC Summit in Kathmandu. We are the Chair of SAARC and have consistently worked to revive the stalled SAARC process (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019).

When SAARC faces obstacles today, historical evidences show how Nepal along with other like-minded countries worked proactively to bring all member countries together. With the same understanding, this study begins by discussing the emergence of South Asian regionalism and critically discusses Nepal's efforts to strengthen SAARC, while India pushes for BIMSTEC over SAARC.

### **Emergence of Regionalism and SAARC**

The idea of regionalism gathered momentum across the globe mainly after the end of World War II. Western European countries first mooted the idea of regionalism with the purpose of harnessing social and economic development to ensure robust cooperation among the countries.

New alignments and strategies were vital in the wake of the Cold War to expand areas of influence in the newly emerging international domain. During the Cold War, a host of regional organisations such as the RIO Pact, Organisation of American States in Latin America, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in Western Europe, Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) in West Asia, Association of South East Asian Countries (ASEAN) and the European Union (EU) came into existence. Regionalism as a means of consolidating relations with the countries of a particular geographic area or like-minded countries to preserve and promote their common politico-strategic and economic interests gained momentum in the post- Second World War international order. It is considered to be a concept somewhere in the middle of nationalism and universalism (Upreti, 2008, p.1).

There are many regional organisations across the globe, and the common destiny of all organisations is to achieve economic cooperation and upgrade the idea of growing together. The basic objective of any regional organisation is to integrate its members through common economic aspirations. It means that despite having acrimonious political or strategic relations, economic aspects would ultimately help bring harmony and cooperation among member

countries (Khanal, 2010, p. 156).

Another stimulus for the advancement of the idea of regionalism was the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). This became a key foreign policy plank of Third World countries, which provided an impetus for regional cooperation soon after World War II. NAM itself was not a regional organisation, but it contributed to spurring the concept of regionalism in Third World countries that were not allied to any of the power blocs led by either the US or the former Soviet Union.

The wave of regionalism and NAM prompted South Asian countries to forge a regional organisation to deal with their common problems, such as poverty, connectivity and improving the lives of its people. The efforts towards regional cooperation in South Asia began as a part of the phenomenon of Asian identity. In fact, the post-independence leadership in India thought it in terms of cooperation in South Asia from a wider perspective. Since it was felt that most of the Asian countries had similar experiences of colonial exploitation and underdevelopment, so there was a need to work together for preserving their independence and sovereignty (Upreti, 2008, p. 9).

With the realisation of a regional body of South Asian countries, fresh ideas were floated in the 1970s, and discussions among academicians, civil society and media started to pick up about the necessity of such an organisation.

All countries sought help from other countries in their respective endeavour for economic development and quest for political stability because all countries of this region were suffering from common problems of instability, poverty, unemployment and other social and economic woes. On the other hand, the leadership of South Asian countries sought political legitimacy of their regime because some countries were newly formed, while others were passing through a dictatorship.

In the ongoing debate on regionalism, in fact, Nepal is the first country in South Asia that proposed regional cooperation on utilising its water resources to produce hydro power (Thapaliya, 2019, pp. 117-127). While addressing a gathering of foreign delegates to the 26th Colombo Plan Consultative Meeting in Kathmandu in 1977, King Birendra had said, "It is our conviction that if cooperation can be called for, especially cooperation of Asian countries such as Nepal, India, China, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and all other regional countries, a vast resource of bountiful nature can be tapped for the benefit of man in this region...Given genuine friendship and mutual cooperation, I declare in the name of my people and my government that Nepal is willing to co-operate in such a joint venture, a venture that will lead not only to 'Planning Prosperity Together' but also emphasise our independence" (Thapaliya, 2019, pp. 117-127).

Nepal's initiations to establish the SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu was another proof of its strong commitment to the regional body. Bangladesh had proposed to establish the secretariat in Dhaka, but King Birendra insisted on keeping it in Kathmandu. The Kathmandu Declaration, endorsed by the Third SAARC Summit held in November 1987, states: "The Heads of State or Government expressed their satisfaction at the establishment of the SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu, further strengthening the process of regional cooperation in South Asia. They expressed their gratitude to His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev for most graciously inaugurating the SAARC Secretariat (SAARC Declaration, 1987). Not only the SAARC Secretariat, two vital centres-the SAARC Tuberculosis Centre and SAARC Information Centre-were also established in Nepal.

By forming regional organisations like SAARC, Nepal wanted to transform its bilateral cooperation into a broader regional framework and arrangement. In 1988, King Birendra once more reiterated that 'Nepal is willing to cooperate in any venture for the multipurpose development of her water resources, bilaterally, trilaterally or multilaterally for the mutual benefit of the region (Thapaliya, 2014-2015, pp. 117-127). As Nepal actively supported regionalism, Bangladesh took the lead in the campaign to establish a regional organisation. Then Bangladeshi President Zia-ur-Rahman first tossed the idea of regional cooperation by holding informal discussions. Experts from South Asia also recognise the initiation taken by Nepal to forge SAARC. Informal discussions regarding the need of a new regional organisation were going on for a long period, but a concrete proposal for regional cooperation in South Asia came from Bangladeshi President Zia-ur-Rahman in May 1980. In fact, he had been working on this idea for quite some time and had been approaching India and other countries in the region. The then King Birendra strongly backed the idea floated by then Bangladeshi President Zia-Ur-Rahman regarding the formation of a regional body (Upreti, 2008, p.9).

Before SAARC came into existence, other regional organisations had already begun to function in Asia. The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) had begun functioning by 1967, having evolved as an independent grouping from the defense organisation, the South East Asian Treaty Organisation (Nihar, 2012, pp. 49-55).

All these developments prompted the South Asian countries to come together to form a regional grouping. After seven countries, namely Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, agreed to set up a regional organisation, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was formally set up with the signing of the SAARC Charter in

Dhaka on December 8, 1985. The Secretariat of the Association was set up in Kathmandu on January 17, 1987.

Though other countries stood in favour of regionalism, the idea of establishing SAARC did not go well with India and Pakistan. India was of the view that through the establishment of the regional body, small countries in the regional body would gang up against it. In Pakistan, there was the fear that India's domination would further cement in the region through SAARC. Amid such apprehensions, SAARC was founded because other countries in the region strongly backed the formation of the regional body, and India and Pakistan were not in a position of rejecting such ideas (Bhattarcharjee, 2018, p. 14). So, despite having some reservations, both India and Pakistan joined SAARC because other countries in the region had pushed forward the idea. Also there was a wave of regionalism after 1970, with the United Nations too acknowledging the concept of regional trade.

“The idea of establishing regional cooperation in this part of the world was reinforced by the acknowledgement of the concept of regional trade arrangements during the 6th Session of the UN General Assembly in 1974” (Hamal, 2014 p 43-59).

When it comes to Nepal's regional affiliation, Nepal is a member of SAARC, a member of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectorial Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), a member of Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), and it is also a dialogue partner of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Nepal's strong backing of the regional organisation is also reflected in its conduct and functioning of its foreign policy. For instance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a separate division called the 'Regional Organisation Division' dealing with SAARC and BIMSTEC, which is headed by a joint secretary.

### **SAARC: Hostage of Indo-Pak tension**

Since its inception, SAARC has been caught up in the conflict between India and Pakistan. Due to the conflict between the two nuclear powers, summit-level meetings have been deferred several times, paralysing the entire SAARC process, which has badly affected ongoing projects and scheduled projects. South Asian scholars have been stating that the status of bilateral relations between India and Pakistan has been a major influencing factor for the survival of the SAARC. It is also believed that being two major and nuclear power countries in South Asia, SAARC would remain a so-called talking shop until these two countries could see eye to eye with each other keeping aside or resolving their loads of issues, bickering and animosity developed as a result

of the legacy of the colonial era. Regionalism should precede bilateralism, and it should give way to more strong regional commitment that would help create a peaceful, just and harmonious community in South Asia ( Khanal, 2010, pp. 156-157).

Amid the India-Pakistan tension, experts are of the view that as the largest member country, India bears greater responsibility to revive the SAARC process. SAARC today suffers from many problems. But an attitude of its central power that SAARC was born with anti-Indian zest, relations between its two powerful members and collective decisions to bureaucratise the Secretariat are at the centre. As the most powerful member, by far the largest in size, population, economy and military, India's political leadership bears a special responsibility to lead the SAARC process forward or else inspire the smaller members to lead the transformative process by supporting intellectually, diplomatically and financially" ( Simkhada, 2018, pp. 30-31).

Experts are of the view that the only way towards revitalising the SAARC process is holding its due SAARC summit as soon as possible, and for that to happen, there is a need to maintain cordial relations between India and Pakistan, but they are nowhere in sight. SAARC can only be revitalised by taking damage control measures like holding the 19th SAARC Summit at the earliest; refraining from hostile propaganda against each other; implementing the decisions of SAARC for bettering regional cooperation; and pursuing a forward looking instead of a retrogressive approach. Personnel vendetta, which is a known culture of South Asia, needs to be replaced with a positive vision so that the future of the region is better than its past and present ( Moonis, 2018, pp. 45-46).

Amid the dark clouds hanging over SAARC, there are silver linings, too. The video conference among the government and state heads of the eight South Asian countries on March 15, 2020 has sprouted some hope about reviving the moribund SAARC, but it failed to give fresh impetus to the whole SAARC process. The conference was the first of its kind after the indefinite postponement of the 2016 SAARC Summit and suggests that SAARC member countries are capable of collaboration on pressing common issues, such as public health and climate change, by setting aside their other differences.

The India-Pakistan standoff was clearly seen during the video conference as well when Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan failed to participate. Khan designated his Minister of State for Health Dr. Zafar Mirza, who used the forum to make remarks on Kashmir, in response to which India later remarked that Pakistan had misused the platform.

SAARC as an organisation has not functioned effectively as a regional organisation largely due to the conflict between the two. In its 35 years, SAARC has held 18 summits. There was the provision of holding a summit-level meeting every year, but the 18th SAARC Summit held in Kathmandu in 2014 decided to hold it every two years. Even under the new provision, three summits should have been held in the last six years, but not even one has taken place. From 1985 to 1988, summits took place on an annual basis. Again from 1990 to 1993, summits were held annually. Summits again took place in 1997 and 1998. After that summits usually took place biennially. Then the summits took place in 2004, and in 2005, 2010 and 2011. After that, the 18th Summit was held in 2014 in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Till now, Nepal has convened three SAARC summits-in 1987, 2002 and 2014. In the last decade, the frequency of summits has gone down compared to the first two decades. While the first decade witnessed eight summits, the second decade saw six and the third decade only four. There are also examples of India and Pakistan agreeing to hold SAARC summits even during crises. The summits have provided them an opportunity to interact with each other on the sidelines of the meetings.

In 2004, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee attended the SAARC Summit held in Islamabad. In the SAARC Summit held in Kathmandu in 2002, Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee and Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf held a brief chat. So, despite the strained bilateral relations, India and Pakistan must agree to hold the next SAARC summit as soon as possible.

### **Nepal's Efforts to Strengthen SAARC**

Since its inception, Nepal has always stood in favour of organising SAARC summits on time and strictly implementing decisions taken at the summits. This paper, however, has certain limitations as it documents only the efforts made by the Government of Nepal to revive the SAARC process mainly after the indefinite postponement of the SAARC summit that was to take place in Pakistan in 2016. Not only holding summits, Nepal is consistently and continuously pushing for the effective implementation of decisions reached after the 18<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit.

There is a need for regular follow-up and implementation of decisions made at the summit from all government mechanisms. As we have made international commitments, it would be our bounden duty to help implement the decisions, fulfill the obligations and promote regional cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs n.d). With the need to give priority to SAARC commitments, sustained efforts on Nepal's part, as the current Chair of SAARC, to negotiate and

navigate in the regional organisation, is required taking into consideration Nepal's sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence, protection and promotion of national interests via regionalism (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015).

### **Nepal's post-2016 : Efforts to Revive SAARC**

As in the past, Nepal as the Chair of SAARC is working hard to convince other countries to hold the summit-level meeting as soon as possible. The 18th SAARC Summit held in Nepal had decided to hold the 19th SAARC Summit on November 9-10 2016, in Islamabad and was set to hand over SAARC's chairmanship to Pakistan.

However, the planned 19th Summit was cancelled at the eleventh hour after India refused to attend it following the Uri attack, an Indian Army base camp in Kashmir. Besides India, four other SAARC members-Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri Lanka-pulled out of the summit, indirectly blaming Pakistan for creating an environment not suitable for holding a successful summit. The four countries then had immediately supported India's position to boycott the SAARC summit. Nepal's case was, however, different, as it was not in favour of postponing the summit indefinitely. Nepal issued a press statement commenting that it had taken this development seriously. Nepal went on to urge the regional partners to create a conducive environment for holding the 19th SAARC summit at the earliest despite the Indo-Pak tensions. After Pakistan informed Nepal about the postponement of the SAARC summit, Nepal issued another statement regretting the postponement for an indefinite period, as it was not possible to hold the summit without having all member countries on board. In this period, Nepal took a firm stance against postponing the SAARC summit for an indefinite period.

Since then, Nepal has been requesting India to agree to hold the SAARC summit at all bilateral talks and meetings. However, India has been insisting that the regional environment was not conducive for holding the summit while proposing that it could participate in the SAARC process if it was organised outside Islamabad. However, Pakistan is unwilling to oblige. At all bilateral and regional forums, the KP Oli-led government formed in 2018 has been continuously stating that there is no alternative to SAARC and thus needs to be revitalised sooner than later.

On February 8, 2020, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli visited the SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu. There, PM Oli remarked, "Neighbourhood relations and regional cooperation are one of the priorities of our foreign policy. As a founding member and current Chair of SAARC, Nepal strongly believes in regional cooperation to promote collective well-being of the people of South Asia" (The Himalayan Times, February 8, 2020).

Highlighting the importance of SAARC and Nepal's unwavering support to it, PM Oli further said that SAARC was an expression of our regional solidarity in South Asia and that it had become a common identity for the people of this region (ibid). "It represents hope of over 1.7 billion people from this region for accelerated economic growth, social progress and cultural development." Stating that the 19th SAARC Summit was long overdue, he said, "We are eagerly looking forward to handing over the chairmanship. I hope the SAARC member states will come up with consensus to convene the summit at an early date" (ibid).

With the purpose of reviving the SAARC process, Nepal, as the current Chair of SAARC, hosted informal meeting of SAARC foreign ministers on the margin of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York in September 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019. But those meetings were overshadowed by the India-Pakistan conflict. On September 27, 2019, Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi kept away from the SAARC Foreign Ministers meeting as the Indian Foreign Minister was delivering his address, and once the Indian minister finished and left, the Pakistan minister made his entry. In 2020, Nepal again organised a virtual meeting of SAARC foreign ministers. In the meeting, Foreign Minister Gyawali 'urged the Member States to explore all viable options to hold the 19th Summit at an early date and to generate new momentum and dynamism in SAARC (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

In all those meetings, Nepal's priority has always been on convincing the member countries to convene the stalled SAARC summit as soon as possible. As the Chair of SAARC and with Indian PM Modi, PM Oli could take the initiation to convince the former to hold the summit.

Today, PM Oli is in a unique position to talk to Modi that a more effective SAARC is not against India, but in the interest of all members, including India. On the contrary, resistance to strengthen SAARC risks not only SAARC but also India's pivotal role in South Asia in regional affairs, (Simkhada, 2018).

Nepal is utilising bilateral meetings with other member countries to create an environment for holding the SAARC summit. Speaking with foreign policy experts and journalists in the first week of January 2019 in New Delhi, Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali strongly pitched for convening the SAARC summit, saying differences should be resolved through dialogue and the grouping should collectively deal with terrorism and other key challenges facing the region. Gyawali (2019) said, "If US President Trump and North Korea's Kim can meet, then why not (leaders of) other countries (Economic Times, Jan 11, 2019). It was a clear reference to India's refusal to sit with Pakistan for a summit-level meeting. This is not the first time that Nepal has stood for

convening the SAARC summits on a regular basis. Nepal faced a situation similar during 1999-2002.

Nepal has always opposed any move to postpone a summit citing Indo-Pak tension or a political situation in a member state. In 1999 while Nepal was serving as chair, it protested against India's decision to postpone the summit scheduled for November 1999 citing military takeover in Pakistan. In January 2002, Nepal successfully held the Eleventh SAARC Summit in Kathmandu.

### **India's Push for BIMSTEC and Nepal's Position**

While Nepal and other member states are continuously pushing for the revival of SAARC, India is projecting BIMSTEC as an alternative to the regional body, but Nepal has consistently been insisting that BIMSTEC cannot replace SAARC. Both the initiations and gestures demonstrated by India clearly show that it wants to push BIMSTEC at the cost of SAARC though this has not been clearly stated in official meetings. After the indefinite postponement of the 19th Summit, there are worries about the fate of SAARC because India has pushed for BIMSTEC as an alternative to SAARC. For example, at the BRICS outreach programme held in October 2016, India had invited the heads of state and government from the BIMSTEC region.

In May 2019, during his swearing-in ceremony after being elected the prime minister for a second term, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited leaders from the BIMSTEC member states, which clearly signals India's shift from SAARC to BIMSTEC. However, Modi, during his first swearing-in in 2014, had invited the SAARC heads of government and states, including the prime minister of Pakistan.

Additionally, Indian government officials and policymakers are pushing BIMSTEC as an alternative to SAARC, but other countries are unwilling to accept this. Referring to BIMSTEC, which connects South Asia with Southeast Asia, Indian Minister for External Affairs S. Jaishankar in January 2020 said: "SAARC has certain problems and I think we all know what it is... even if you were to put the terrorism issue aside, there are connectivity and trade issues. If you look at why BIMSTEC leaders were invited for PM's swearing-in... we see energy, mindset and possibility in BIMSTEC" (The Economic Times, June 7, 2019).

These two examples clearly indicate India's preference for BIMSTEC over the SAARC process. More than that, policy briefs by government ministers and officials also clearly suggest that India wants to give up the SAARC process in favour of BIMSTEC. Not only government officials, even the think tanks and civil society in New Delhi are pushing for BIMSTEC as an alternative to

SAARC due to the Pakistan factor. Deliberations are also being held in New Delhi about a SAARC minus Pakistan.

Following the postponement of the SAARC summit, India has been holding many activities related to BIMSTEC. Since 2017, India has been convening the meeting of national security chiefs of the BIMSTEC region to collaborate on terrorism issues. Similarly, India held military drills of BIMSTEC countries in 2018, but Nepal declined, stating that it would not join any military exercise.

Despite India's disdain for SAARC, Nepal and other member countries have not given up their efforts to revive the SAARC process. Other member countries of SAARC say BIMSTEC cannot be a replacement as the two regional organisations have distinct identities and relevance. Along with Nepal, Bangladesh is coming out strongly to revive the SAARC process. In an interview, Bangladeshi Ambassador to Nepal Mashfee Binte Shams said:

“The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation is not a replacement for SAARC as the two regional bodies have different objectives and areas of operations.” “SAARC brings together the countries of the region that were closely integrated before the British came here and created artificial divisions. Before the British arrived, the region had many principalities and kingdoms, but we were integrated and there was a lot of internal trade. So, SAARC tries to revive that pre-British integration. Whereas BIMSTEC is about promoting trade between the two economic regions of ASEAN and South Asia. So one cannot replace the other” (Annapurna Express, February 14, 2020).

Scholars and experts are also maintaining that BIMSTEC cannot replace the SAARC as the two bodies were formed with different visions and by accommodating different geographies. Not only Bangladesh, when heads of state and heads of government of countries such as Sri Lanka and the Maldives visited New Delhi, they underscored the importance of reviving the SAARC process without any delay. In the case of Nepal, when our prime minister and foreign minister held bilateral talks with the member states, they stressed on the need to revive the SAARC process as the priority. While attending Modi's swearing-in in May 2019, Nepal's Prime Minister openly urged the member states to revive the SAARC process, a clear hint at India. “I don't want to talk about regional and other issues. But, as the Chair, Nepal wants to revive SAARC and make it effective again. Developing relations in the region is better than anything else,” (India Today, 2019).

At the BIMSTEC Summit held in Kathmandu in 2018, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli clearly mentioned SAARC to emphasise that BIMSTEC

could not replace it, which was very meaningful in the sense that such a statement came at a time when India was pushing for BIMSTEC over SAARC. PM Oli said: “Nepal stands for meaningful regional cooperation. We believe that SAARC and BIMSTEC do not substitute but complement each other. We are also committed to advancing sub-regional cooperation under BBIN” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). Other heads of state or government of South Asian countries, however, made no mention of SAARC.

### **SAARC and Nepal**

Nepal has had strong attachment to SAARC since its establishment as it sees regional organisations as platforms to engage with the outside world for economic development. With political stability at home, Nepal now aims to increase its engagements with international and regional organisations; hence, all the more importance of a regional body like SAARC for Nepal than in the past.

In the last three decades, SAARC's platform was helpful for Nepal to establish an independent identity in South Asia and beyond. Similarly, the SAARC platform was instrumental in enhancing access to Bangladesh. It provided a periodic platform for interacting with other countries as high-level exchange of visits with those countries is minimal. More than that, Nepal sees SAARC as a vital instrument for promoting regional cooperation. Nepal is also taking a lead in some areas of regional interests. At the 18th SAARC Summit held in Kathmandu, Nepal played an active role to ‘initiate cooperation in the field of migration, cooperatives and social protection, featured for the first time in the SAARC agenda and reflected in the Declaration’.

“SAARC is a very important platform for Nepal to develop close relations with the neighbouring states. According to geographical location, SAARC is important for Nepal in terms of security, trade, development, tourism, problem of terrorism, etc. Nepal's economic interests are best served through regional cooperation. SAARC helps Nepal to decrease its dependence upon India, and this is possible only by enhancing its ties with the neighbours through SAARC. (Kumar, 2016). Nepal has, on many occasions, successfully utilised multilateral forums and the UN to neutralise and minimise the influence of neighbouring countries in its internal matters (Nayak 2014, p. 24-25).

Increasing regional trade through SAARC is another top priority of Nepal. Nepal along with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh pushed forward the idea of the South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA), which was signed in Dhaka on April 11, 1993. The objective of this agreement was to lay the

foundation for the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA). One of the crucial benefits that Nepal can get from SAARC is expanding trade with other countries in the SAARC region.

The SAPTA agreement provided a framework and institutional basis for trade liberalisation and economic cooperation between the SAARC member countries. SAPTA categorised SAARC member countries into Least Developing Countries (LDCs), namely Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, and non-LDCs- India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The agreement provided special and differential treatment to the LDCs by the non-LDCs. This was about providing deeper and wider tariff preferences. SAPTA was the first step towards SAFTA. The concept of SAFTA was mooted at the 11th SAARC Summit held in Kathmandu in 2004, and it was signed at the Islamabad Summit in 2006.

SAFTA is beneficial to Nepal due to multiple reasons. Nepali policymakers had reasons to believe that joining SAFTA would be helpful for Nepal to expand its exports to countries other than India, collectively called “Rest of South Asia” (RSA), and thereby contribute to geographic export diversification (Kumar, 2016, p. 4 ). However, Nepal’s foreign trade continues to be concentrated with India, with which it has a bilateral preferential trade agreement since 1950.

While Bangladesh has emerged as Nepal’s third largest export market globally, the growth in exports is overwhelmingly due to the surge in exports of a single agricultural commodity, lentils. Through SAFTA, Nepal can expand its export to Bangladesh and other countries. Energy cooperation is another area which Nepal can benefit from SAARC. The sub-regional body, BBIN, is mulling over energy cooperation between Nepal, India and Bangladesh.

Due to climate change, Nepal’s Himalayan region is witnessing a fast melting of snow, which needs to be highlighted at regional and international platforms. The melting of snow not only impacts Nepal but also the entire region. So through SAARC, Nepal can garner the support of other countries to mitigate the effects of climate change in the Himalayas. Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka have huge potentials for hydropower. If these three countries export electricity to other member countries, it will reduce the use of fossil fuel in the region and ultimately help to ameliorate the adverse impact of climate change. Similarly, India has made remarkable progress in solar energy. Other countries could share India’s knowledge and technology in this field.

### **Push for Sub-Regional Framework Under SAARC**

Not only SAARC, Nepal is pressing for sub-regional cooperation among like-minded parties within the broader framework of SAARC. In order to avoid dependence on its neighbours, regional tensions and hiccups to development,

### *Nepal's Role in Strengthening SAARC 185*

Nepal proposed a move towards sub-regional cooperation (Thapaliya, 2014-2015, pp. 117-127). In the meeting of the SAARC Council of Ministers held in 1996, Nepal had proposed sub-regional cooperation among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal.

Nepal's initiative was endorsed by the regional actors at the SAARC Summit in the Maldives in 1997. Subsequently, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal requested the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for assistance in facilitating their economic cooperation initiative. This request led to the implementation of the South Asian Sub-regional Economic Cooperation (Thapaliya, 2014-2015, pp. 117-127). Despite Nepal's push for sub-regionalism, it did not move ahead as expected.

In 2015, however, a pact was signed among the four member states of the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) that allowed their cargo and passenger vehicles to operate in each other's territory without having to clear customs at the border. However, Bhutan's main opposition and transporters are opposed to the pact for fear that such free movement will increase pollution and affect its tourism and the local culture besides ultimately affecting the country's sovereignty. The sub-regional BBIN cooperation has not moved ahead due to the internal opposition in Bhutan.

Nepal is also taking initiatives to expand the areas of cooperation under the broader framework of SAARC. Nepal is making efforts to set up a network of SAARC parliamentarians. The International Relations and Labour Committee of the Legislature-Parliament of Nepal convened the 'Regional Conference on SAARC Effectiveness' in Kathmandu on September 29-30, 2016. Chairpersons of the Parliamentary Committees dealing with SAARC affairs from all the member states had attended the conference.

### **Conclusion**

As mentioned earlier, SAARC cannot be revitalised until and unless there is a thaw in the relationship between India and Pakistan. Additionally, India as the largest member country in terms of size, population and resources has a key role in making SAARC a vibrant regional organisation. If India is genuinely committed to regionalism and connectivity, it should not choose BIMSTEC over SAARC; instead it should push for the growth of both organisations simultaneously.

Also, other member states-Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Afghanistan and Bhutan-must persuade India and Pakistan to have them agree on holding summit-level meetings regularly by putting aside their bilateral differences. As the Chair of SAARC, Nepal has an even bigger role

to persuade the two countries, but the experience of the last four years shows that Nepal's efforts alone will not yield much; other member countries should also strongly back Nepal's efforts. Instead of supporting the position taken by India, as in 2016 when the decision to cancel the Islamabad Summit was taken, all countries should take a strong and independent position in favour of holding the summit, and they must raise this issue with India and Pakistan at bilateral meetings.

Similarly, small countries should increase their say in the SAARC process instead of depending too much on India for funds and other logistics. For instance, soon after the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19), Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi took up the leadership to organise a video conference, an initiative that could have been taken by the smaller countries. At times of crisis, even small countries should come forward to take the lead.

Notably, the small countries of South Asia should abandon the tendency of perceiving India as a big brother or see SAARC as a mechanism by India to advance its hegemony in the region. Countries, especially Pakistan and also some other countries, should abandon such a mindset and become ready to cooperate on connectivity and other projects initiated by India.

At the same time, small countries should increase their budgetary contribution to SAARC, which is facing resource constraints to implement projects, and not rely heavily on India for resources. Unforgettably, all countries should seriously take measures to tackle terrorism and not allow their soil for breeding terrorist activities. Most importantly, the current efforts made by Nepal to revive the SAARC process are not sufficient. Nepal as SAARC's Chair should present itself confidently and talk with India and other member countries about hosting the SAARC summit.

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# CAPITALISING NEPAL'S SOFT POWER HERITAGE IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

■ Amish Raj Mulmi

## Abstract

*As Nepal forges ahead in the 21st century, linked to two Asian powers by thousands of years of shared cultures and histories, it is time for Nepal to capitalise on its heritage and look to the future. Nepal must claim and revitalise our shared histories of Hinduism and Buddhism, and create a soft power potential that emphasises traditional religious practices, natural and cultural heritage, and sustainability in a time of climate change. The paper argues that Nepal should anchor itself in the past - invoking the idea of a shared civilisation - and look to the future. The potential of religious and cultural tourism must be fully realised while being sustainable. Private sector entrepreneurship in culture must be encouraged, especially as culture itself - or the many cultures within Nepal - must be thought of as a tool to emphasise Nepal's soft power. Nepal stands to lose US\$ 460 million in the tourism sector alone due to the Covid-19 pandemic and it must diversify its tourism offerings if a recovery is desired. Building on a study of historical literature and contemporary trends in filmmaking, brand marketing and perception building, this paper argues that Nepal must invest in its culture and heritage to build an export policy around geographical indications (GIs), establish a new film production template, making it easier for foreign filmmaking companies to come to Nepal, and finally, reinvent its tourism policy in a world ravaged by the Covid-19 pandemic.*

**Keywords** : *Soft Power, Tourism, Religion, Buddhism, Cultural Heritage, Filmmaking, GI Tags*

## Introduction

In November 1956, the Nepali Buddhist organisation, Dharmodaya Sabha, organised the fourth Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Kathmandu. Bhikkhu Amritananda (1961), the then president of Dharmodaya Sabha, wrote, "Not only was there a delegation from China, but also one from the Soviet Union. Thus the Buddhist friends of socialist countries, for the first time in the modern history of Buddhism, met and exchanged ideas among the Buddhists of different countries in the world."

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In turn, the Buddhist Association of China, the official religious body, invited Nepali Buddhists to China. In July 1959, the Nepali Buddhist delegation visited the country. Bhikkhu Amritananda was suitably impressed by China's achievements. "People's China (sic) has produced everything that she needs for everyday life" (p. 8). The Nepali delegation was taken to several Buddhist shrines in Beijing, among which was a stupa that housed several relics of the Buddha. A Chinese Buddhist official told the Bhikkhu, the Nepali king, Mahendra, had gifted then Prime Minister Zhou Enlai with nearly fifty relics. Despite it being the early days of the bilateral relationship between the People's Republic of China and Nepal, the President of the Chinese Buddhist Association invoked the shared past of the two nations by telling the Bhikkhu, "Buddha was born in Nepal 2,500 years ago [and] China has received monks and artists from Nepal in the past" (p. 20).

The root of India-Nepal-Tibet-China cultural contact inevitably returns to Buddhist proliferation along existing trade routes along the Himalayas. If we regard the modern political boundaries as Nepal proper, the 5th century visit of Kapilvastu monk Buddhahadra to China is, perhaps, the first recorded instance of a Nepali visiting China (Manandhar, 2004). Tradition holds that Buddhahadra belonged to the same Sakya clan as Gautama Buddha, and he completed his Buddhist studies at the age of 17 and went to Kashmir, a Buddhist centre of learning at the time. There, a group of Chinese travellers requested a scholar travel back with them, and Buddhahadra was chosen, setting out in 406 CE and reaching three years later.

Nepali historian V.K. Manandhar suggests Buddhahadra was expelled from Chang'an, the ancient Chinese capital today known as Xi'an, in 410 CE after a religious dispute with another scholar named Kumarajiva. Buddhahadra settled in the mountainous district of Lu Shan with 40 disciples, and in 418 CE, he became a translator at Tao Chang Ssu Monastery in Chien-yeh, modern-day Nanjing, overseeing the more-than-hundred monks who translated Buddhist scriptures into Chinese (Manandhar, 2004).

Buddhahadra eventually died in China in 429 CE, at the age of 71, after spending 21 years in the country. However, by then, he had translated several Buddhist works into Chinese, including a few with Faxian, his contemporary. Manandhar emphasises Buddhahadra's importance to ancient trans-Himalayan contact by suggesting it was he who taught Chinese monks how to wear monastic robes in the style of the Indian plains, i.e., by baring one shoulder.

While Buddhahadra and Faxian, the 5th century Chinese Buddhist traveller, have often been regarded as the first cultural exchanges between the Nepali and Chinese civilisations, most recently by none other than Chinese President Xi Jinping himself in his op-ed published widely in Nepali newspapers before his state visit in October 2019, the resonance of these historical stories in the modern day is more relevant than ever. Nepal lies at the crucial juncture of Hinduism and Buddhism, and as our two neighbours - India and China - rise to become global powers in the 21st century, Nepal must reorient itself to look at how it can make the most of our shared cultural histories, while ensuring its cultural diplomacy remains an influential factor in its bilateral and multilateral relations and correspondingly raise the profile of its economic diplomacy and foreign trade policy.

The following paper will build on the aforementioned themes of religious heritage and the corresponding soft power, along with a study of historical literature and contemporary analyses, on how Nepal can capitalise on its culture, history and natural splendour to project itself as a nation full of opportunities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Drawing on various sources that break down how we can do so, it argues Nepal must capitalise on these opportunities to reinvent itself in the coming years, when economies around the world will seek to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic's debilitating effects.

### **Soft Power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

One of the most important aspects of diplomacy in the 21st century is of 'soft power', an amorphous idea that collates all aspects of culture, history and public outreach (Nye, 1990). First put forth by American political scientist Joseph Nye, the concept came into vogue in the last decades of the 20th century with the realisation that while 'hard power' - military superiority - remains "the ultimate form of power", its use had become more costly. Although traditionalists still continue wishing for hard power as an ultimate expression of a state's power projection capabilities, the 'peaceful rise' of China - using trade and economic interdependence as primary force capabilities - has forced other powers to rethink this concept and veer towards the influence of soft power. As Nye wrote in 1990, "Although force may sometimes play a role, traditional instruments of power are rarely sufficient to deal with the new dilemmas of world politics. New power resources, such as the capacity for effective communication and for developing and using multilateral institutions, may prove more relevant" (p. 164). Further, "if a state can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others, it will encounter less resistance to its wishes. If its culture and ideology are attractive, others will more willingly follow" (p. 167).

Increasingly, nations battle each other not with the threat of military superiority, but over the control of ideas, ideologies and narratives. Consider the Covid-19 pandemic, and the war for its narrative. While the US and China each fling barbs at each other over the origins of the virus, China has expanded its soft power diplomacy - through the use of medical aid and a hitherto lesser-known visibility on global social media channels - at a time when the US is reeling under the pandemic. New strains are being seen on traditional relationships. According to Gordon (2020), “Trump’s failure to lead a coordinated global response, together with his practice of berating, belittling, and bullying the United States’ closest and wealthiest allies, has, remarkably, allowed many to view China as a more responsible global leader than the United States”. At the same time, Beijing is moving quickly to fill in the void left by the US’ inward approach. Campbell and Doshi (2020) write, “Beijing understands that if it is seen as leading, and Washington is seen as unable or unwilling to do so, this perception could fundamentally alter the United States’ position in global politics and the contest for leadership in the twenty-first century”.

There is little doubt that the world will emerge from the pandemic with new lessons. More importantly, new contours will reshape alignments and positions - all without the use of coercion or force. Although hard power - the ability of a state to coerce another to its will through its military strength or the perception of its use - remains important, it is increasingly clear soft power will be as influential, if not more, in a world that remains globalised even as its people begin to believe in isolationism.

Further, states like ours cannot compete with other powers in military terms - even if territorial acquisition is, in the short term, an extremely costly measure for any power (for example, Russia and its international isolation post the Crimean acquisition). Thus, in the absence of hard military power, Nepal must rely on soft power to convince other nations of its goodwill and to raise its profile among several nations competing for the attention (and markets) of the world. To do so, it needs to build a ‘brand’ for itself that goes beyond traditional outlooks and perceptions of the country, which incorporates its heritage as part of its economic policy through the use of various measures. And finally, it needs to communicate this message to global audiences, in a language they will understand and through means they can access.

This means thinking beyond the traditionalist mindset of current policymaking; it would mean thinking about soft power from the perspective of a brand and its image, even if a ‘brand’ is traditionally associated with a consumer ‘product’. However, there are several examples of a country or its products

being associated with a particular idea of exclusivity, such as Swiss chocolates (or banking), South Korean TV dramas and popular culture, and French wine. The governments of these respective states incorporate their global image as part of their cultural and trade diplomacy, as we will see - in other words, using private sector brand-building and communication strategies to achieve a state's objectives. While tourism has been predicated on such a brand - think Kerala as 'God's own country' or Dubai's positioning as a shopping destination that saw more than 16 million visitors in 2019 - it is now evident diplomacy must go hand in hand with a state's economic and foreign trade objectives as well as a desire to see its own idea of culture being propagated as widely as possible.

Increasingly, it is clear our neighbouring states are in a soft power tussle of their own. This is particularly relevant in the case of Buddhism. While India wishes to claim Buddhism's values as its own, China would also like to be identified with the religion, considering it has the world's largest number of practitioners. In between, while our political establishment has consistently maintained 'Buddha was born in Nepal', there has been little work towards claiming the Buddhist story as a Nepali one, despite several comparative advantages that allow it to do so. While the greater Buddhist circuit - the three major sites of Sarnath, Bodh Gaya and Kushinagara, and the smaller sites of Sravasti and Pipraha - has been utilised by India to push it as a tourism vehicle (Bhonsale, 2019), Nepal has put little development into Lumbini, perhaps one of the most important religious sites globally, despite the town attracting around 170,000 foreign visitors in 2018. In comparison, Bodh Gaya, in neighbouring Bihar, was visited by around 270,000 foreign visitors, while Sarnath, near Varanasi, was visited by 435,000 visitors the same year (Bhonsale, 2019). This indicates that Lumbini remains severely underutilised as a tourist destination even for foreign visitors who go to Buddhist sites in India.

Further, even as Nepal remains an important site for Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimage, the tourism industry is susceptible to global supply shocks - apart from the pandemic, which is a 'Black Swan' event. By itself, tourism cannot elaborate on, or build upon, a nation's soft power. The thinking that tourists will automatically come if one builds a hotel needs to be expelled; instead, what is required is for Nepal to shape the narrative about itself. It needs to tell the world its story. It needs to build upon its cultural and natural heritage, and not rely on them only. Above all, it needs to think 'out of the box'.

This paper builds upon Nepal's heritage and current position in global affairs to push forth the idea that its position as the meeting point of two grand Asian civilisations must be harnessed to realise its soft power potential. It provides

a few suggestions as to how to think about culture, religion, geography and history in the 21st century, even as it seeks to identify a convergence between policymaking and private sector initiatives. Nepal's greatest weapon in the realm of public diplomacy is its culture. It must look to its past and build upon it for the future. And finally, cultural diplomacy will remain key, but only policymaking at home will help us realise it.

### **'Shikar' Diplomacy**

Nepali diplomacy was, in fact, skilled at projecting soft power, especially in the absence of hard military power that could seriously affect colonial territorial expansions of the British imperial era (Mulmi, 2018). Between the end of the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century, despite the Rana autocracy and xenophobia, Nepal had excellent relations with European colonial powers. One example of this lies in the number of high-profile visits to Nepal by European dignitaries. For sure, these visits did not advance Nepali interests but Rana interests, motivated as the autocracy was for its own survival. But the visits raised Nepal's profile several notches and also played a part in the Rana insistence that Nepal was a separate sovereign kingdom unlike the princely states of British India.

It was against this background that some of the most massive shikar campaigns the subcontinent has ever seen were held in the Nepali Terai, with no one but the Ranas who put up a "bigger 'big shoot' or offered a more spectacular hunting 'bag'" (Mulmi, 2017). These shikars were not just a display of 'manhood' or 'heroic' skills with the gun, but also diplomatically useful. As anthropologist Mark Liechty (2019) writes, "With game stocks dwindling elsewhere, Nepal's Terai lowlands acquired almost mythical status among British hunting elites" (p. 102).

In 1876, a year before Jung Bahadur, the first Rana prime minister of Nepal, would pass away, Prince Albert Edward, the heir to the British throne, was on a state visit to India. He visited what was then known as Naya Muluk on a shikar trip. Stone (1877) writes, "seven hundred elephants were employed in beating the jungle, and the Prince shot no fewer than six tigers [in one day]" (p. 619). The hunt had been organised in what was then called 'Naya Muluk', a strip of Terai flatlands the British had returned to Nepal in gratitude in 1860 and today encompassing the districts of Kailali, Banke, Bardiya and Kanchanpur. The 700 elephants crossed the Sharda (or Mahakali) River in single file in the grasslands of what is today the Shuklaphanta National Park, and the prince went out with a pack of tame elephants to try to capture a wild one.

Soon after, other members of the royal family such the Duke of Portland (in

1884) and Prince Albert Victor, the Prince of Wales' oldest son (in 1889-90), came to Nepal for organised shikars. In March 1893 came another royal visitor, Prince Franz Ferdinand of Austria, perhaps the first non-British royalty to participate in a Nepali hunting expedition. Then in 1901, the Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, came for a shikar expedition, and Chandra Shumsher hosted him. Political scientist Leo Rose (1971) writes of the visit:

“What these two brilliant and ambitious men discussed in their meetings in the Terai in April can only be conjectured... On June 26, 1901, about two months after his return to Kathmandu from the Terai, Chandra staged a successful coup d'état. Dev Shumsher was obliged to resign and eventually was allowed to proceed to India. Recognition of Chandra's seizure of power came almost immediately from Calcutta, arousing even deeper Nepali suspicions concerning the nature of the Terai talks between Curzon and the new prime minister” (pp. 152-153).

More high-profile visitors would follow: in 1911, King George the Fifth hunted in Chitwan; in 1938, Lord Linlithgow, Viceroy of India, would arrive. Such 'shikar diplomacy' continued till the Ranas were ousted, but even after their ouster, King Mahendra saw the potential in hunting as a potential revenue for the state until the dawn of environmental consciousness led to the ban on it. Although hunting cannot be a means for the future today, one must realise why Nepal became 'the most sought-after hunting destination in the world' (Liechty, p. 103). The shikars in the Nepali Terai matched with the Westerner's view of the Orient, and as the global elite began to view the Nepali Terai as an untouched virgin land that provided some of the best big game, a shikar invite from the Ranas became one of the most coveted prizes in this part of the world. What Nepal's 'shikar diplomacy' tells us is that for nations like ours, hard power may achieve a sense of security in terms of sovereignty, but soft power goes much beyond military hardware in creating an image, a 'brand', that becomes a legacy. For, it is in 'shikar diplomacy' that one can trace the roots of adventure tourism in Nepal. From hosting dignitaries to rich Westerners willing to spend money on shoots in the Terai, Nepal moved to eco-tourism in the 1970s as part of a global consciousness towards environmental protection. With the creation of national parks like Chitwan, Nepal sought to shift its image away from a shikar paradise to one where conservation and environmentalism would now lead the way. It is this legacy that we still reap benefits from to this day. It is also why Nepal must take the lead in conservation, especially at a time of climate change.

### **Reactivating Buddhism's Soft Power**

A 2017 study on the United Nations' Office in Geneva arrived at some most intriguing conclusions (Nisbett & Doeser, 2017). First, that while soft power is to 'stand out', cultural diplomacy means to 'reach out'. "Reaching out' is about displaying unity with others, building political solidarity, bringing countries closer together and sometimes acting as a bridge between other parties" (p.14). Similarly, soft power is often unidentifiable, or immeasurable. One cannot know the 'returns' on a particular sum invested in a soft power campaign immediately; instead, the gains accrue over a period of time. At the same time, its influence is undeniable, and culture is often a weapon to achieve diplomatic objectives.

Countries and cities around the world have invested in showcasing themselves as global cultural centres. For example, China was supposed to have 3,500 museums by 2015; instead, it had 3,866 by the end of 2012 itself. "The Mao Zedong generation was taught that China's traditional art was backward and not worth bothering about. Now young Chinese are interested in both traditional and contemporary art" (Economist, 2018). Further, China has increasingly been more vocal about its art treasures that are housed in museums across the world. In fact, "One of the country's most powerful corporate conglomerates, the state-run China Poly Group, launched a shadowy programme aimed at locating and recovering lost art" (GQ, 2018). Nonetheless, China's efforts showcase the necessity of investing in culture as a tool for diplomacy--a practice countries in the West have long followed. For example, the British Museum had 6.82 million visitors in 2015, while the Louvre in Paris had 9.6 million visitors in 2019.

This brings us to Nepal, where cultural spaces have not been seen as a weapon for soft power and diplomacy. However, just because they weren't seen as such in the past does not mean such a state of affairs needs to continue in the future. Culture, in fact, remains Nepal's most prized asset. But like most assets, it must be invested in if it is to grow and accrue benefits. Consider the following case study about Buddhist art and paraphernalia, a space Nepal has historically been known for, and can potentially be a global leader:

The first Buddhist art was aniconic, in that it portrayed the wheel of Dharma, Buddha's footprints, an empty throne or a Bodhi tree as representations of Siddhartha Gautama. With the Kushans, this changed. Although this early stage of Buddhist art has not been traced in Nepal, Banerjee (1972) holds that with Mathura as the centre of both political power as well as Kushan artistic tradition and the development of Mahayana Buddhism, the artistic sensibilities

spread to other parts of the subcontinent, such as in Nepal. Buddhism had long been prevalent in Nepal; several kings had bestowed grants upon monasteries to gain merit. Nepali artistic traditions were at first influenced by the Kushans and the Guptas, and subsequently by the art of the Palas of Bengal, a 'logical successor of Gupta art', under whose influence 'Buddhist art reached a new high of development' (p. 69). As Mary Slusser (1982) wrote, 'The Nepali style appears to continue the Buddhist tradition, especially as manifested in the murals in the distant caves of Ajanta... Despite the anarchic political milieu, the bronze casters and goldsmiths seem to have gone about their work in the foundries and shops. Many of them were Buddhist monks working in the viharas... The arrival of so many new deities of endless and complicated forms, together with the demand for them as cult objects, must have stimulated the metallurgist's skills and accelerated his production. In addition to the local market, from the tenth century on there was also an insatiable demand for cult objects in Tibet' (p. 50).

The Nepali religious art form is today one of Nepal's most underrated and invisible brands. While historically Nepal had been a source for artists and sculptors, today our art has mostly been restricted to the tourist districts - although we continue to cite Arniko as one of our greatest artists, and the pillar of historical Sino-Nepal relations. And despite increasing exports of sculptures and metal works from Rs. 366 million in 2009-10 to Rs. 1.22 billion in 2015-16, the industry is not adequately highlighted, nor its issues resolved via policymaking. Artists who can work with sculptures are increasingly rare to find, despite a willing global market.

One must understand why Nepal was considered, despite its overwhelming Hindu population, to be a Buddhist country in the era after the Second World War. After integration of Tibet, it was closed off to international visitors who saw it as a mythical Shangri-La, a utopian paradise that took Westerners away from the travails of modern capitalism. Since Tibet was closed off, the next best alternative was Nepal, which not only had a sizable population that practised the religion and its accoutrements, but it also was where Tibetan refugees established new monasteries replicating the ones in Tibet.

The use of GI tags to identify and market products as being unique to Nepal is essential in taking them to the global market. According to the World Intellectual Property Organisation, "a geographical indication right enables those who have the right to use the indication to prevent its use by a third party whose product does not conform to the applicable standards". With a GI and

sufficient oversight, Nepal will be able to implement the commercialisation and sale of Bodhichitta seeds and Limi Valley bowls with the same uniqueness as, say, tea from Darjeeling or champagne from the Champagne region of France. In fact, the GI tag can reap benefits beyond commercial revenue. In recent years, India has taken the lead in applying for GI tags for its many handicrafts and products. It currently possesses 618 GI tags for products as diverse as Madhubani paintings to Mysore silk. However, Nepal does not have a single GI-associated product it can sell, despite possessing hosts of them. The khukuri, for instance, can be registered for one, so can Bhaktapur's 'curd of kings', the jaju dhau. Madhu K. Marasini (2019) wrote, "A trade and development project, supported by the European Union, identified the value chain development of four Nepali products, namely, tea, coffee, Chyangra pashmina, and Lokta paper as GI. A report produced by the project recommends that five basic pillars have to be met for a functioning GI, namely, legal framework, proven geographic connection, producer organisations to lodge the GI application, a code of practice, and a guarantee system".

GI tags assure both buyers and sellers not just of premium value, but also of the product's originality and exclusiveness. For example, Bangladesh has recently acquired GI tags for the Hilsa fish, Jamdani sarees and the Khirsapat mango. The European Union estimated that agri-food and drink products registered under GI tags could bring in sales revenue worth 74.76 billion euros in 2017, and almost 15 per cent of all agri-food exports from the EU in that period were represented by geographical indications (European Commission, 2020).

This brings us back to our historical art processes, specifically the art of sculptures and the paubha, or what is known internationally as the thangka. While Nepali art forms populate museums, private homes and corporate offices globally, Nepal itself has never been able to fully realise its potential, not just in building a Nepali brand, but also in encouraging local industry, artisanship and employment. The bronze sculptures and paubhas that proudly tell the Nepali story of handicrafts and artisanship are simply showpieces in tourist shop windows. Instead, developing a proper market around them - through classification and standardisation of prices depending on the expertise of the work, ensuring local employment and tapping into their export potential - will allow Nepal to create a brand separate from other Buddhist markets. At the same time, there are several niche private sector developers who already make jewellery oriented around Nepali culture - Aamo and Kaligarh are two recent examples. Developing a unified policy that allows for interactions between the private sector and the public, and promotes Nepali artisanship as unique in

the world through exports, sales and special promotions, will create more than just a new brand; it will reinvigorate what Nepal has historically been known for: its craftwork. After all, even Kublai Khan had to import a Nepali artist to his court.

### **Becoming South Asia's New Zealand**

One of the most fascinating examples of what Nepal stands for in the 21st century can be seen in the 2013 Chinese film *Up in the Wind*. In the film, Cheng Yumeng (played by Ni Ni) is a Shanghai food critic whose editor sends her to Nepal - 'practically the Switzerland in the East,' she says - for an issue on happiness. 'And what's more, Nepal's happiness index is really high,' her editor says.

Cheng is disappointed, to say the least. Because she has had to leave a trip to Italy behind for Nepal. Nonetheless, she puts up a brave face because she needs the job. And off she goes to Nepal with a Chinese tour group - a physical journey that transcends into a spiritual revelation, for Cheng has been living a lie all this while, a facade that erases her provincial past in the chrome and steel and glitz and glamour of Shanghai. Her parents named her Tianshuang - 'happy-go-lucky everyday' - but she changed it to Yumeng - after a mythical creature that cannot fly - because she cannot live up to the name's expectations, of being happy everyday. "Every time I pretend to be someone I am not, I pretend so that people can look up to me a little bit," she confesses. Ultimately, it is the tests she has to overcome in Nepal - mostly personal, but a few temporal, such as a protest, a power-cut - that allow her to embrace who she really is.

*Up in the Wind* becomes an advertisement for Nepali tourism in parts, and I came to it after Basu Tripathi, a former member of the Nepal Tourism Board who runs Adam Tours and Travels in Pokhara, told me the 2013 film was one of the reasons why the Chinese started to travel to Nepal in large numbers - specifically to paraglide like Cheng does at the end of the film - much like the 1999 Nepali-French production *Caravan*, which brought global focus on the Dolpo region. 'Because of [Caravan], there was great interest in travelling to Nepal in the European market. Unfortunately, we could not capitalise on it because of the Maoist war. Ultimately, the film is just an instrument. There are several factors to keep in mind for a tourist to come to Nepal. But what can definitely be said is that from the tourism point of view, Nepal's image in the Chinese market is positive'.

From *Up in the Wind*, we can learn that Nepal's image in the international travel market revolves around a few ideas. The first is the modern-day appeal

of its religious heritage. Beyond the temples and the monasteries, travellers to Nepal increasingly look towards practising yoga and meditation in the country. This leads us to enquire: can Nepal develop and market itself as a hub for the two, beyond the already existing centres in India? Nepal can do so, provided that there is a larger focus on developing the domestic spirituality and wellness industry. Yoga schools, meditation centres and alternative lifestyles that have emerged as counters to modern corporate lifestyles can be encouraged through an oriented government programme that pushes the Nepali brand.

The second lesson from the film is that the Nepali Himalayas will never lose their appeal, and increasingly, Nepal is seen as a hub for adventure tourism. This leads us to argue that while the industry must be promoted, and new spots discovered for such tourism, the government must ensure the implementation of a universal safety standard that foments the trust of travellers in these tourism activities. Further, Nepal must tap into the growing environmental consciousness once more, as it has done in the past. While adventure tourism must be developed as a brand, sustainability should always remain the focal point. Several tourist destinations across the world today suffer from overpopulation, Thailand's popular Maya beach and Ladakh being two examples. A surge in tourists have led to environmental degradation in these spots, and serious questions are being asked about whether tourism should focus on high value, low numbers, as Bhutan has done. This is something Nepal needs to think about urgently.

The third lesson, and perhaps equally important, is that Nepal's physical beauty must be invested in and marketed to beyond a crowd that comes to the country. To achieve this, we have to invest in a longer-term marketing programme that takes the Nepali brand abroad. There are several ways of achieving this: encouraging international media coverage through articles and documentaries is one. However, if we are to ensure a sustained interest in Nepal, one possibility is to encourage international feature films to shoot in Nepal. Apart from *Up in the Wind*, another example is the massive Hollywood production *Dr. Strange*, which was shot in Kathmandu, and brought in nearly US\$ 700 million in box office sales. Similarly, the Hollywood mountaineering blockbuster *Everest* was shot in bits in Nepal. Further, Nepal's historic association with iconic Bollywood films such as *Hare Ram Hare Krishna* continues to be evoked by those who know of the country.

The most prominent example of countries using mainstream films as part of their soft power potential is New Zealand, which turned the blockbuster *Lord of the Rings* sets into tourist locations; 18 per cent of all visitors in 2015 cited

### *Capitalising Nepal's Soft Power Heritage in the 21st Century 201*

the Hobbit trilogy as the reason for visiting the country. When the news broke that the Lord of the Ring web series, worth nearly US\$ 1 billion, would be shot in New Zealand, its Economic Development Minister Phil Twyford said, "This will be an ambitious production and having it based here will create a range of benefits, including jobs and significant overseas investment, which will unlock more opportunities to grow our creative and technology sectors."

To achieve this, Nepal must encourage foreign filmmaking production houses to see the country as a possible filming location. Locations must be identified and developed; adequate fiscal and investment policies must be devised so that local employment can be generated and production companies are interested. Two of the world's largest film industries - one by volume, the other by box office revenue - belong to India and China, respectively. We must capitalise on these. Nepal can become a premium filming destination for the world. But we must learn to think in the language of global cinema before we can do this. Similarly, Nepal must also pick up on the correlations between popular culture and diplomacy. As Weldes and Rowley have noted, "'world politics' looks broader and more complex than it did, shifting from a narrow focus on supra-/trans-/international state relations and practices to trans-border practices by powerful non-state actors, to increasingly seeing the sub-national/regional and hyper-local - the everyday, in fact - as globally and politically implicated," highlight different ways in which states utilise popular culture to further their diplomatic goals: through wartime and peacetime deployment of popular culture in other nations; through inter-country collaborations on popular culture; through popular culture representations of global geopolitics; through the politics of consumption; and through the understanding that culture flows work both ways (Weldes and Rowley, 2015).

#### **Nepali Tourism Needs to Evolve**

Academic Mark Liechty brilliantly traces the history of Western fascination with Nepal in his book *Far Out: Countercultural Seekers and the Tourist Encounter in Nepal (2019)*, and how it evolved over the years. The first 'regular' Western visitors to the country after the fall of the Ranas were diplomats or expats associated with aid agencies, such as those in the Peace Corps. King Mahendra's 1956 coronation is regarded as Nepal's 'coming out' event, in which the king wanted to showcase the country to the world as a sovereign nation in the post-Second World War global environment. However, "the [international] press were less taken by Mahendra's carefully presented 'Development Exhibitions' than by the sheer spectacle of the [coronation]: a combination of Victorian pomp and ceremony with inscrutable Eastern rituals

and exotic local people, set before the backdrop of Kathmandu's magnificent medieval architecture, blue sky and white Himalayan peaks" (p. 43). The ascent of Everest in 1953 paved the way for Nepal to emerge as a mountaineering destination, which soon evolved into adventure tourism, i.e., trekking.

The 1960s and 70s saw the arrival of thousands of Westerners who came to seek 'eastern wisdom'. As mentioned above, the allure of Tibetan Buddhism turned Nepal into an alternative Shangri-la, with hippies, beatniks and students of eastern religions making their way into the country. In the 1970s, King Birendra, in keeping with the times, turned Nepal away from such exoticism and promoted the country as an eco-tourism destination, replete with virgin mountain trails, lush national parks preserving endangered species and medieval architecture that was a gift to the world.

The worrying bit is, despite such policies and imaginations being framed in the 20th century, Nepal's tourism policy continues to revolve around the same ideas even in the 21st, more than 40 years after they were framed. The recent Visit Nepal Year campaign displayed this adequately. The Yeti sculptures, for example, should have been advertised outside Nepal's foreign missions across the world; they served little purpose here in Nepal. Similarly, what made the Visit Nepal Year 2020 different from the 1998 campaign? Very little. The focus on increasing tourist numbers, without paying adequate attention to why people would want to come to Nepal in the first place, will result in such ill-designed campaigns. Further, policymaking in Nepal is guided by the presence of 'experts', who are usually private sector operators with personal interests riding on the policy.

Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic has laid bare the necessity of diversification even within sectors such as tourism. According to the World Bank, the impact on Nepal's GDP due to losses in the sector arising out of the pandemic will be US\$ 460 million. More than 230,000 jobs are at risk, while 20,000 tour and trekking guides find themselves out of a job, and 2,600 trekking agencies have closed down (World Bank, 2020). The multilateral agency concluded that the sector will not see demand for at least six to nine months, and recovery will take twice this time. And after domestic tourism, the first market to rebound will be intra-regional tourism, thus making it imperative for Nepal to identify and focus on niche sectors within the tourism market that are attractive to travellers from India and China. The World Bank recommends "[d]iversifying products and services in the tourism industry is equally important to avoid dependence on a single activity or market" (page 12). Other recommendations are to provide new skills and innovation within the sector, upgrading

destination services, strict health and hygiene protocol implementation, and regional collaboration.

What Nepal needs to do is to realise what the country stands for in outsiders' imaginations. While the Western imagination of Nepal continues to be fuelled by the Himalayas and exoticism, closer home, Nepal becomes more of a spiritual paradise, as reflected in *Up in the Wind*, and a centre of pilgrimage, as thousands of Indian religious tourists who arrive annually think. Nepal must channel its soft power focus towards a few essentials to begin with to allow tourism to recover. Policymakers must also assimilate the belief that no sector operates on its own in a silo; developing the tourism sector around Nepal's cultural heritage also implies policymaking decisions that allow exports that emanate from Nepali heritage to prosper.

And finally, acquiring GI tags for unique Nepali products will bring in innovation and entrepreneurship in these sectors, helping Nepali economic diplomacy to reach new heights. It must also activate its regional organisational affiliations with SAARC and BIMSTEC to capitalise on its religious and cultural tourism potential; it must regain its legacy as the centre of arts in South Asia. As an Asian century dawns upon us once again, we must grab this opportunity with both hands.

### **Conclusion**

As we've seen, the past holds various keys for Nepal in the future, as does the present. Located between two of the world's biggest nations by population, the 21<sup>st</sup> century portends an era where Nepal must project its soft power by capitalising on its various heritages. With tourism a major contributor to Nepal's GDP, the country must focus on what more it can offer. There is vast potential to develop Nepal as a location for international film industries, as seen by the success of recent films shot in the country. Similarly, there is great potential to develop ancillary industries and encourage existing private sector players in the fields of religious and cultural heritage. With Nepal's historical success in art and crafts, there is little doubt that it can once again capture this space in the future. With the ever-growing popularity of Buddhism, religious circuits must be nurtured and developed accordingly to meet visitor expectations. As we've seen from the numbers, Nepal still needs to play catch up even with its neighbouring countries. And finally, Nepal must develop and register various GI tags so that its unique products can be marketed in the global consumer market.

All of this requires policymaking that is attuned towards projecting Nepal's soft power and heritage in the international market. While tourism infrastructure

needs to be developed, policies that invite foreign film production companies via tax-breaks, subsidies and effective and transparent implementation will also allow the domestic film industry to become more competitive globally. Nepal also must begin the process of registering GI tags for products unique to the country, such as pashmina, yarsagumba, juju dhau, paubha, Limi Valley phuru bowls and khukuris. Let the world know that the Nepali khukuri is the best in the world, not just because of its craftsmanship, but also because of Nepal's rich history of Gurkha soldiers and their bravery. At the same time, policies must also encourage new and existing entrepreneurs in these sectors to look towards exporting their products. This will require a more accessible export policy that makes it easier for even smaller private sector enterprises to access the global market, possibly backed by effective banking policies for lending purposes.

To do so, policymakers must reach out to private sector individuals who are already operating in these respective sectors and understand current issues that hinder their growth. Beyond an expert group, this will require a broad vision that seeks to develop the Nepali brand in the global market. For, it is not sufficient for Nepal to be known simply as the land of Everest or as the land of Buddha, especially in a post-Covid world. Nepal needs to convey its stories via the products it can offer to the world. Only then can its soft power potential be fully realised.

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# AN INTELLECTUAL IN THE CORRIDORS OF POWER

■ **Jaya Raj Acharya**

## **Introduction**

A reviewer of my book *Yadu Nath Khanal: Jivani ra Vichar* (Yadu Nath Khanal: Life and Thoughts) wrote: “Prithvi Narayan Shah unified Nepal, Bhanubhakta Acharya standardised Nepali language and Yadu Nath Khanal intellectualised Nepal’s foreign policy”. Indeed Professor Yadu Nath Khanal made outstanding contributions in explaining Nepal’s foreign policy to the international community in modern terminology. His thoughts on Nepal, Nepali literature and Nepal’s foreign policy are compiled in a book *Nepal’s Non-Isolationist Foreign Policy* (Kathmandu: Satyal Prakashan, 2000) that has 100 articles divided into five sections. Professor Khanal was a scholar, literary critic and successful practitioner as well as a thinker of Nepal’s foreign policy. But above all, he was an intellectual par excellence. I will begin this biographical sketch of Professor Khanal with his birth and academic career and conclude it with an extract from Professor Kamal P. Malla (1936-2018), himself a great scholar, who described Professor Khanal as “an intellectual in the corridors of power”.

## **Life and Career**

Born in 1913 in a middle-class family in a village called Manung in Tanahu district, Yadu Nath Khanal was the youngest of the three sons of Naranath Khanal and Tara Devi Khanal (né Acharya). He got his primary education in Sanskrit from his father at home. At age 12, he went to Kathmandu for further education at Sanskrit High School at Ranipokhari. When he went back home during the winter vacation of 1926, his parents got 13-year-old Yadu Nath married to nine-year-old Kamala (1922-1990) as per the orthodox tradition of the upper caste Hindu society in the villages of Nepal.<sup>1</sup> Even then, young

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Khanal is survived by his three children: Vijaya Gyawali married to Kumar Gyawali, who was also a career diplomat (Foreign Secretary and Ambassador), Shubha Baskota married to Dr. Narottam Baskota and Dr. Udaya Raj Khanal (Professor of Physics in Tribhuvan University). They also have two children each.

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■ He served as Nepal’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations (1991-94). Fellow at the International Institute of Asian Studies in Leiden, the Netherlands and at the Weather head Center for International Affairs at Harvard University (1995-96), Dr. Acharya was also a Randolph Jennings Senior Fellow at USIP Washington DC (2006-07).

Yadu Nath continued his studies in Kathmandu and passed his Madhyama (Intermediate in Sanskrit) in first division in 1931. Then he left his Sanskrit education and joined Durbar High School for an English education and passed the School Leaving Certificate standing first in first division in 1935. He did his I. Sc. from Tri-Chandra College (1937), and B. Sc. (1941) and M. A. (English) in 1943 from the University of Calcutta.<sup>2</sup> Then he earned a post-graduate diploma in English Educational Thought and Practice in 1953 from the University of London. He also took the opportunity to visit some European countries the same year.

Professor Khanal taught English at Tri-Chandra College from 1943 to 1955. He was then nominated as member-secretary of the Nepali delegation to the Afro-Asian Conference held in Bandung (Indonesia) April 18-24, 1955, and wrote the speech for the leader of the delegation, Shobhag Jung Thapa, the Foreign Secretary of Nepal. It was the first international conference that Nepal had attended after the country emerged from the century-long Rana family oligarchy that kept the people deliberately in educational darkness and isolation from the rest of the world. Thus, the year 1955 saw the beginning of Professor Khanal's career in international relations so to speak. It was a happy coincidence for him since this year (1955) was the beginning of a new chapter of non-isolationism in Nepal's foreign policy as it also took membership of the United Nations and established diplomatic relations with China.

Professor Khanal was, of course, a keen observer of international affairs as he grew intellectually during the momentous period of World War I and II and the Indian struggle for independence led by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. He had met Nehru even as a student in Calcutta in the early 1940s. He was also aware of some Nepali leaders participating in this struggle.



**Yadu Nath Khanal**

*Photo courtesy: Avidit Acharya*

<sup>2</sup> Professor Khanal said that he walked four or five days straight to Kathmandu and back home twenty times during his student life when there was no other mode of transportation than walking. He often said that getting an education was indeed a tapasya, or penance.

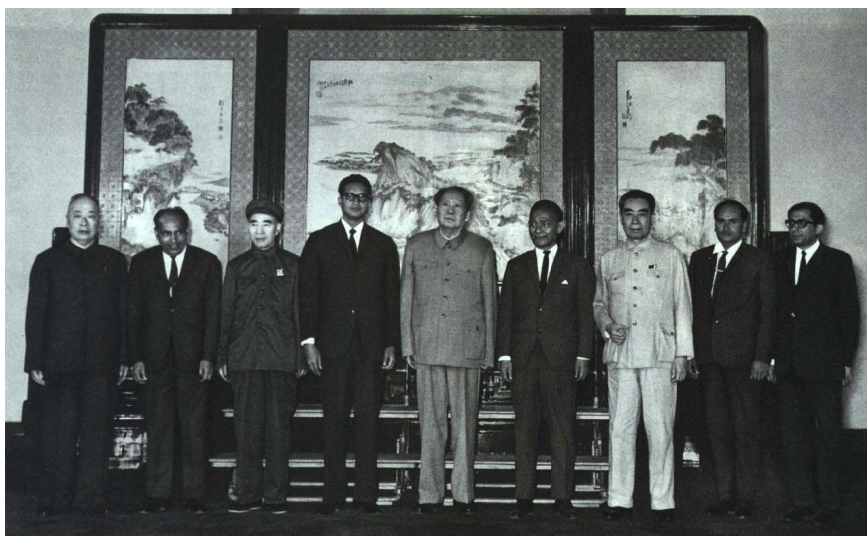
In 1956, Professor Khanal was invited to Singh Durbar as Home Secretary and Private Secretary of Tanka Prasad Acharya (Prime Minister, January 1956-July 1957). In the meantime, Professor Khanal was sent to University of Oregon, USA to be trained as the Vice-Chancellor of the proposed Tribhuvan University. On his return from the US, Professor Khanal found that the Acharya cabinet and the subsequent K. I. Singh cabinet had been dismissed by King Mahendra. But the King appointed him Member of the Yojana Mandal (Planning Commission) headed by Prince Himalaya (January 6, 1958). When the first general elections were held in February-March 1959, the Nepali Congress emerged as the largest party with two-thirds seats in the parliament to form the government, and Professor Khanal was sent to the UN as a member of the Nepali delegation by the new government. He contributed in drafting the speeches of the delegation leaders Surya Prasad Upadhyaya (1959) and B. P. Koirala (1960).

Upon his return from the UN in December 1960, Professor Khanal was appointed Foreign Secretary by King Mahendra in early 1961. His intellectual contribution as an explainer of Nepal's foreign policy is particularly remembered as he wrote the highly appreciated speech of King Mahendra for the first summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) held in Belgrade in 1961. The speech laid the fundamental guidelines for all practical purposes of conducting Nepal's foreign policy in the future. His job as Foreign Secretary of Nepal was not easy as the India-China border war erupted in October-November 1962.

When the Nepali Ambassador to India, Nar Pratap Thapa, died in a plane crash, Professor Khanal was appointed ambassador to succeed him in 1963. Again, it was a trying time in Nepal-India relations following King Mahendra's dismissal of the first parliament and imprisonment of Prime Minister B. P. Koirala and his cabinet colleagues. So Ambassador Khanal, seeking to improve relations between the two countries, worked on many diplomatic and intellectual fronts, and gave lectures and interviews explaining Nepal's position and published a book *Reflections on Nepal-India Relations (1964) Stray Thoughts (1966)*. It is said that Professor Khanal, during his tenure as Ambassador to India, was instrumental in getting the Letters of Exchange between India and Nepal regarding the import of arms by Nepal signed on January 30, 1965. Of course, he signed it as Royal Nepalese Ambassador to India, but it was a Nepal Army-initiative endorsed by King Mahendra and signed in the presence of Kirti Nidhi Bista, Vice Chairman of the Council of Ministers and the Foreign Minister of His Majesty's Government of Nepal in New Delhi. Mr Bista was

on a visit to India from January 25 to February 7, 1965 ostensibly to participate in the Indian Republic Day celebrations on January 26, but the real purpose of his visit was to witness the signing of the Letters of Exchange as the King's confidant and representative. According to Rishikesh Shaha, King Mahendra was really worried about India's intention against him, especially under Indira Gandhi. So he took this initiative to remove the Indian apprehension that Nepal in collusion with China would not pose any security threat to India. The letter was kept secret until it was published by the Indian government in *The Statesman* (May 27, 1989).

Ambassador Khanal was called back to Kathmandu to take up the post of Foreign Secretary again. He accompanied King Mahendra on his visit to the US and the United Nations and wrote the King's speech in which he said, "The only alternative to the United Nations is a stronger United Nations." Earlier in the same year (1967) tensions were high in Nepal-China relations following an incident at Bhrikuti Mandap where the Chinese stall was vandalised by some youngsters on the ground that a bigger picture of Mao stood next to that of King Mahendra. Following the incident, the Chinese Ambassador had left Nepal without informing the government. So, Professor Khanal suggested sending a high-level visit to China to resolve the issue. He then went with Foreign Minister Kirti Nidhi Bista to China in 1968 and was successful in removing the misunderstanding between the two governments.



From left to right: Chen Yi, Y. N. Khanal, Lin Biao, Kirti Nidhi Bista, Mao Zedong, Ranadhir Subba,

Zhou Enlai, Mani Raj Upadhyaya, Basudev Toofan, 1968. Photo courtesy: Brajesh Upadhyaya

In 1969 Professor Khanal, as Foreign Secretary, led the negotiating team of Nepal to get the Indian Military Liaison Group (IMLG) and Wireless Operators to withdraw from the Nepal-China border. They had come to Nepal in 1952 for a limited period of time with three mandates: (1) modernising the Nepal Army, (2) building the Tribhuvan International Airport and (3) monitoring the Nepal-China border with its wireless operators.

Foreign Secretary Khanal also worked with great diplomatic tact to get Nepal elected in 1968 as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for a two-year term (1969-1970). He was however not as happy with the pace of social and economic development of Nepal, and resigned from his position as Foreign Secretary to go to the Harvard University as a fellow (1970-1971). He wrote a long paper “Nepal between India and China: An Aspect of Evolving Balance in Asia” analysing the evolution of Nepal’s foreign policy. When he returned home in 1972, he was a Visiting Professor at the Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA). In 1973 King Birendra appointed him ambassador to the United States and Canada.

Professor Khanal was also recognised as an outstanding scholar in the US and was conferred an honorary degree of Doctor of Law by Claremont University of California in 1974. He returned to Nepal in 1975 without completing his term as ambassador owing to the health of his wife. In December that year, he was appointed by King Birendra as Chairman of the Public Service Commission. Then an intellectually ever-productive Professor Khanal published a collection of 33 articles on various topics in a book *Nepal: Transition from Isolationism, (Kathmandu: Sajha Prakashan, 1977)*.

In 1978, Professor Khanal was appointed ambassador to China and served there until 1982. It was a time when China was passing through a crucial period of transition from the era of Mao Zedong to that of Deng Xiaoping. But he said that it would be wrong to attribute change in China’s foreign policy to an individual leader as the great country was propelled primarily by its national interest more than any personal preferences of a leader. In this context, his observation on China’s policy towards Nepal can be useful to the Nepali policy-makers and diplomats. To quote him:

“The Chinese are realists. They recognise that the relations between Nepal and China, between Nepal and India and those between China and India are basically independent. Each of them has its own logic of development. Each must be pursued on its own merit. To my

knowledge, they value Sino-Nepalese friendship and respect our independence and sovereignty. They are not likely to pursue their relations with other countries at the expense of Nepal. Their leaders are very particular about this. Again, however, with much value to Sino-Nepalese friendship, they are realistic enough to recognise that this friendship cannot be a substitute for either Indo-Nepalese friendship or Sino-Indian friendship. As they are working independently to improve their relations with due respect to the sensibilities of their friends with a hard look at their own national interest, so they expect us to do the same in our pursuit of relations with India.”(Khanal, 1998)<sup>3</sup>

In 1982, Professor Khanal came back to Kathmandu from Beijing and retired from government service, but the country needed the service of his wisdom, so he was nominated member of the Raj Sabha (Royal Council) in April 1983. He was appointed advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) in early November 1984 in the wake of the assassination of Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984 as King Birendra was naturally concerned about the fallout of the ghastly incident in its close neighbourhood, which could influence virtually all major political developments in Nepal. It was only Professor Khanal who is said to have had the wisdom and experience to assess the grave situation and advise the government. So he was sent to Delhi to attend the funeral of Mrs. Gandhi.<sup>4</sup>

In May 1985, Professor Khanal represented Nepal at the ministerial meeting in Thimphu (Bhutan) to finalise the Charter of SAARC that held its first summit in Dhaka (Bangladesh) in December 1985. It is said that Professor Khanal conveyed to the representatives of the SAARC countries in Thimphu the wish of King Birendra to establish the headquarters of SAARC in Kathmandu and that it was readily accepted. The same year Professor Khanal went to Bandung to participate in the 30th anniversary of the Afro-Asian Conference that he had attended in 1955.

So although Professor Khanal had formally retired from his career as a diplomat, he did not retire intellectually. He himself wrote:

“I have retired from service. But I have found it difficult to retire from an intellectual interest in Nepal’s social and cultural conditions. I am deeply worried at the confusion and erosion of values in Nepal. I have reflected a great deal on these matters and, in many cases, shared my reflections with others. In this small way I have tried to serve the community in which I live. Though I am conscious that I have been a sort of a rolling stone, a homeless vagabond, in respect of my intellectual and cultural

3 Khanal, Y. N. 1988. *Essays in Nepal’s Foreign Affairs*. Kathmandu: Murari Prasad Upadhyay, p. 125. This book has 26 articles (besides the introduction) that he wrote between 1978-1988 indicating how intellectually active he was even in his retired life.

4 Incidentally, Professor Khanal had attended the funeral of three consecutive Prime Ministers of India: Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi.

pursuits, I have settled as my base at international affairs in general and Nepal's foreign policy in particular.”<sup>5</sup>

Professor Khanal's advice was felt necessary even after the 1990 changes in Nepali politics, which witnessed the overthrow of the partyless Panchayat system, or the direct rule of the King, and restoration of the multi-party system that was disbanded by King Mahendra in 1960. The interim government formed under Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai sought Professor Khanal's advice, so he was appointed advisor in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>6</sup> The elected government headed by Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala also made him advisor of ministerial status in 1991-1993. But then he resigned pleading old age. However, he was still active intellectually, publishing a number of articles while addressing seminars and graduate convocations of Tribhuvan University (TU). Twelve articles of his came out in the form of a book that was his penultimate publication.<sup>7</sup> TU also conferred a degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa) on him in 1997 when he was 85 years old, and he gave an acceptance speech that was the talk of the town. It was a sincere and critical view on the contemporary social (dis)order and the loss of values in Nepali politics.

### **His Advice**

Regarding Professor Khanal's advice to the new generation of Nepali politicians and diplomats, it will be most useful to reproduce the following paragraphs prepared as notes by Professor Mohan P. Lohani, former Ambassador to Bangladesh. Professor Lohani, who was a student of Professor Khanal in Tri-Chandra College, was Executive Director of the Institute of Foreign Affairs (IFA) that had organised a training programme for young Section Officers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) at Shital Niwas. He had invited Professor Khanal to share his thoughts and experiences with the young officers. Professor Lohani summarised in the following way the thoughts expressed by Professor Khanal at the meeting that was also attended by some senior officers of MOFA. Professor Lohani wrote that everyone listened, with pleasure and pride, to the learned professor who did not mince words about how Foreign Service is related to the very survival of a country like Nepal. So Professor Khanal called for seriousness on the part of all concerned- politicians, policy-

5 Khanal, Y. N. *Essays in Nepal's Foreign Affairs*, Introduction, pp. 1-2.

6 Professor Khanal's appointment as Foreign Secretary by King Mahendra immediately after the dissolution of the multi-party political system under the elected government in 1960 and Foreign Policy Advisor by the interim government of Prime Minister Bhattarai after the restoration of multiparty political system in 1990 indicated his indispensability or acceptability even to the opposite ends of the political spectrum of Nepal.

7 Khanal, Yadu Nath. 1996. *Nepal after Democratic Restoration*, Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar. His final book was *Nepali Bhaminivilasa* (1998), a verse-to-verse translation of Pandit-raj Jagannath's Sanskrit work on rhetoric which was remarkable. Thus Professor Khanal lived an active and productive life as aspired by the Ishopanishad that said, "one should aspire to live an active life for a hundred years."

makers and even academics in dealing with both foreign policy and Foreign Service. To quote Professor Lohani's notes:

“Professor Khanal, the only diplomat who had the distinction of serving as Nepal's ambassador to India and China, our immediate neighbours, and the United States, underscored the strategic location and importance of this country. The vital interests of India and China in Nepal and the latter's similar interests in its immediate neighbours can neither be minimised nor overemphasised. Professor Khanal is of the view that there is nothing unusual if a small country comes under pressure from a big neighbour. He distinguished pressure from threat with a different connotation. But what is important is the strength or ability of a country, however small, to withstand the external pressure. This leads one to question whether Nepal, sandwiched between India and China, has the requisite strength, resilience and assertiveness to stand up to the pressure no matter where it comes from.

According to Professor Khanal, a primary objective of Nepal's foreign policy in the fifties and sixties was to establish and maintain the country's international identity. He admits that progress in this area has been achieved over the years. The learned scholar and diplomat also reminded the participants that various games are played in conducting a country's foreign policy. Such games vary from tolerance to submission and even to threat. Nevertheless, each society passes through the stages of pattern maintenance, adaptation, goal orientation and integration. How to adapt international norms and principles to Nepali condition is a challenge, opines Professor Khanal. He, however, hastens to add that in order to accelerate economic progress Nepal must be prepared to sharpen its competitive edge.

Asked to express his views on the future of Nepal's foreign policy, Professor Khanal would not view foreign policy in isolation from variables such as the growth rate of population, availability of food, energy supply and transfer of resources or capital, which determine the very existence of mankind in the next millennium. He does recognise the importance of values in international relations. It is distressing to note that the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which initially enabled Nepal to assert its international identity, had to sacrifice values in order to accommodate some of the worst tyrannies of the world. The seasoned diplomat cited the instance of the European Community which did not accept within its fold countries like Spain and Portugal so long as they were under dictatorship. As regards SAARC, Professor Khanal considers India and Pakistan as vital countries that must be prepared for a give and take attitude if regional cooperation is to

move forward and yield results. The region could have been spared the pangs of nuclearisation. It is a missed opportunity, he regrets. Professor Khanal, by way of recapitulating his experience, reiterated his viewpoint that Nepal must skillfully play the game of diplomacy to serve its vital interests. There is tremendous goodwill towards Nepal from major donors like USA and Japan. Nepal must be able to utilise it. According to Professor Khanal, reliability and consistency factor in foreign policy of smaller countries such as Nepal is very important. He attached great importance to domestic policy, which forms the basis of promoting the objectives of our foreign policy. Finally, emphasising the need for professionalising the Foreign Service, Professor Khanal advised the young officers to take Foreign Service seriously, to broaden their intellectual horizon and to increase their ability to take decisions on important issues of national and international concern.”

### **A Tribute**

Throughout his career as a diplomat or an administrator, Professor Khanal maintained his personality as a scholar or an intellectual rather than just a bureaucrat. So, there cannot be a better way to evaluate or pay tribute to Professor Khanal than to extensively quote Professor Kamal P. Malla, who was also a student of Professor Khanal in Tri-Chandra College. In an article “An Intellectual in the Corridors of Power”, Professor Malla, reviewing Professor Khanal’s book *Stray Thoughts*, wrote the following:

“Singha Durbar is like a sponge. It has an immense capacity to absorb men of all sorts. Inside its porous and spacious offices individual identities and distinctions tend to get blurred. Names tend to be lost in the shady lobbies of an impersonal organisation. The administrative services of the country have in the past decade or two absorbed some of the finest intellects Nepal has produced. Yet in one significant sense of the word these men are a colossal intellectual loss to the rest of the nation. Once they embark on an administrative career, they are more often than not bogged down with an eternal round of executive obligations and trivialities. Above all, a civil servant qua civil servant has little leisure and less freedom to choose and cultivate creative or critical interests which may be within or outside the orbit of his office. These inhibitions are deeply entrenched and have in turn bred a crippling indifference among the administrative elite of the nation. The quality of life led by a teeming section of the nation’s conscious population is intellectually inhibited. Besides, for the last half of a century, the educated and privileged Nepalis have always found the civil service, together with teaching, as the only alternative avenues of employment to farming and shop-keeping. In fact, Singha Durbar houses nearly the

whole consequential hierarchy of public administration, rising from the grass-roots of the clerk-typists and section officers to the spires of the top civil servants. But out of this chiming machinery, operating in an architectural labyrinth, how many individual and distinct voices do we hear? How many men do we recognise who have been able to maintain their identity by a sheer inviolable quality of their personality or critical intelligence? So that people outside Singha Durbar could speak of them not just as Secretary to the Ministry of So-and-So, but as Mr. Such-and-Such or Dr. So-and-So? Walking down the corridors of power many have walked as shades and remarkably few as individuals.

“And who are these identifiable few? Without hurrying to identify and catalogue all of them, one can make an uncontroversial claim that Professor Yadu Nath Khanal is one of the intellectuals who tread the corridors of power and tread them with considerable grace and delicacy. Professor Khanal is certainly one of the few whose energetic minds have not suffered any considerable erosion through surface contacts with abrasive details of a consequential role. He has, indeed, a number of advantages in his beginnings. For one thing, he is not an old time residue: he did not begin his life in administration or as a cog in the wheel of ancien regime. Instead, he is a late-comer in Singha Durbar. His original background was academic. He had been professor of English for more than a decade and had acquired a reputation and standing in the academic world matched by only a few in the profession. Already before entering Singha Durbar Professor Khanal had acquired a critical and contemplative frame of mind. Moreover, his academic background had nothing provincial about it. He began as a brilliant Sanskrit scholar only to emerge as a keen student of English literature with a chequered interlude of honours studies in Chemistry.

“What strikes us about Professor Khanal’s personality, if I may use that inevitable word, is that his official status as ex-ambassador to India or as Foreign Secretary to His Majesty’s Government, is the least obtrusive component of his public image. To many who are outside the Establishment he looms larger and taller as a literary critic, theoretical and practical teacher, writer or intellectual, a public figure honouring public functions and celebrations with unassuming speeches or by contributing seasoned writings to the special issues of our esteemed journals in Nepali and English. What distinguishes Professor Khanal from the rest of the crowd that walk in and out of Singha Durbar every day is the catholicity of his outlook and the range of his interests and activities, both social and intellectual. A foreign secretary with a lucid cogency of thinking about the fundamentals of Nepal’s foreign relations

would be a much less interesting and technical figure. Yet Professor Khanal can communicate with widely divergent strata of Nepali society, speaking now on ‘The Teaching of Science in Nepal’, now ‘On the Role of Sanskrit Today’, writing now on ‘The Youth in Nepal’, now on ‘The Poetry of Siddhicharan Shrestha.’”

As a rule, honest criticism should direct its attention, as T. S. Eliot put, ‘not upon the poet but upon the poetry.’ But in Professor Khanal’s case it is impossible and absurd to concentrate one’s attention on the writings and ignore the writer. This is so because the chief distinction of his writings is in their ‘transparent sincerity.’

Some of the publications of Professor Khanal:

**In English:**

1. Reflections on Nepal-India Relations, New Delhi: Author, 1964.
2. Stray Thoughts, New Delhi: Author, 1965.
3. Nepal Transition from Isolationism, Kathmandu: Sajha Prakashan, 1977.
4. Essays in Nepal’s Foreign Affairs, Kathmandu: Murari Prasad Upadhyaya, 1988.
5. Nepal after Democratic Restoration, Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1996
6. Nepal’s Non-Isolationist Foreign Policy, Kathmandu: Satyal Prakashan, 2000.

This was a compendium of the first five books plus an introduction and an epilogue, but all of them are out of print.

**In Nepali:**

1. Samalochanako Siddhanta (First published by Nepali Bhasha Prakashini Samiti in 2003 B.S. (1946 A.D.) and then by Sajha Prakashan 2033 B.S. (1976 A.D.).
2. Sahityik Charcha, Kathmandu: Sajha Prakashan, 2034 B.S. (1977 A.D.).
3. Nepali Bhaminibilas, Kathmandu: Unnayan Prakashan, 2055 B.S. (1998 A.D.).

**In Sanskrit:**

1. Suktisanchayah, Kathmandu: Author, 2032, 2046, 2047 editions.

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## **Book Review**

# **NEPAL WORLDVIEW: FOREIGN POLICY AND DIPLOMACY**

**Author: Madhu Raman Acharya**

■ **Rudra K Nepal**

British diplomat and author Sir Harold Nicolson observed way back in 1953 that in the British Foreign Service, ‘the man of letters has always been regarded with bewildered, although quite friendly, disdain’. His observation could perhaps be equally true for other foreign services as well. In our own context, the glaring absence of books, journal articles and memoirs written by Foreign Service officers and former career diplomats is a numbing reality, which has no attributable reason as such. There are, of course, some excellent books written by former career diplomats and heads of our diplomatic organisation. But they are few and far between.

Out of such an environment of intellectual complacency prevailing in the circle of retired career diplomats, the advent of the year 2019 brought a surprise gift in the form of a marvellous book entitled “Nepal Worldview”. It is a massive work on Nepal’s foreign policy and diplomacy, running to a marathon length of over 800 pages.

Mr Madhu Raman Acharya, former Foreign Secretary, a career ambassador and former Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations in New York is the author of the book. It has appeared in a boxed set of two consecutive volumes- Vol. I: Foreign Policy and Vol. II: Diplomacy. The two are organically linked by sequentially numbered chapters, continuous pagination from one volume to another and a combined index appearing at the end of Vol. II. The books bear a dignified look consonant with the gravity of the subject they propose to handle.

Mr Acharya has had widespread experience not only in Nepal’s foreign policy, diplomacy and public administration but also as a UN volunteer as well as at various UN missions in different countries and continents. He has authored several books already.

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■ He was Nepal’s Ambassador to Australia (2012-16) with concurrent accreditations to New Zealand and Fiji. He served in Nepal’s diplomatic missions in Calcutta, Tokyo, Washington D.C. and Tel Aviv as a career diplomat. At the Foreign Ministry, he headed the UN and International Organizations Division.

The first volume of *Nepal Worldview* deals with the foreign policy of Nepal and is divided into four parts and 23 chapters. Part I: Foreign Policy Environment begins with a chapter which takes us as far back as the days of myths and legends about the continued existence of Nepal since prehistoric times, and gives a fleeting glimpse of our early and medieval socio-political history as well as the emergence of Nepal as a modern nation and the making of the Nepali worldview, which together set the scene for more substantive later chapters. Part II: Nepal in the Region covers the two immediate neighbours, neighbourhood policy, various regional cooperative architectures, etc. Part III: Nepal's Relations with Major Countries of the World throws light on bilateral relations with the US, the UK, the European Union and some other major countries. Part IV: Nepal in International Organisations and Issues deals, among others, with Nepal's role in the UN peacekeeping operations, non-alignment, human rights, disarmament, international commitments, humanitarian issues, etc.

Most of the chapter titles are catchy, communicative and indicative of the thrust of the author's narratives and arguments. For example, in the third chapter entitled "In the Jungle of Theories", he creates the imagery of a plethora of theories expounded to explain and interpret the crux of international relations and diplomacy. Another chapter entitled "The Elephant in the Room" evokes the image of a giant creature with formidable power whose proximate presence is physically intimidating and psychologically unnerving.

Likewise, the second volume- *Diplomacy*- is divided into two parts and 15 chapters. Part V is entitled *Nepal's Diplomacy* and Part VI: *Economic and Development Diplomacy*. As in the first volume, the second volume also carries imaginative chapter titles such as "From Munsis to Mandarins" (25), "Exiting the 'Poor Man's Club'" (30), "Begging with a Golden Bowl" (37), etc., suggesting an early indication of what they would encompass.

In the preface to the first volume, Mr Acharya says he uses 'the concept of worldview to explain and articulate the outward-orientation of Nepal' and also to explore how others see us. This suggests that it is not just a one-way affair-how we see others, but also how others see us. And his focus of discussion would be on the areas of 'foreign policy, security, economy, and opportunities and challenges in global, regional and international disposition'. And he adopts a broad-based approach to explore the 'issues and options, problems and prospects, and strategies and principles' in Nepal's foreign policy and economic diplomacy'.

The author is aware of the formidable nature and scope of the task he has taken in hand and his limitations as well. He is under no illusion to have mastered all aspects and intricacies of Nepal's foreign policy and diplomacy. 'As a humble messenger of Nepal's diplomacy in which I had a brief stint', writes

Mr Acharya, 'I gathered some interest in inquiring the outreach and intricacies of Nepal's foreign policy and its outward orientation. This book is an outcome of that quest'. He sanitises the whole book with an overarching statement that it only reflects his personal views and interpretations of 'historical antecedents and contemporary phenomena', which have nothing to do with the official views of the position he once held.

The book stands out as the most elaborate undertaking of a former career diplomat so far. In the past also some diplomats with similar practitioner's background have written books on Nepal's foreign policy at various times. Prof. Y. N. Khanal is foremost among the few that naturally come to mind at this point. He was indeed the intellectual trailblazer in this field and a practitioner himself, although he had never thought of getting involved in Nepal's foreign affairs before he was suddenly called upon to embark on this profession. He wrote extensively, elaborating on the foundational principles as well as the existential needs and priorities of Nepal's foreign policy.

Separating foreign policy from diplomacy might look a bit tricky, but it has a British scholarly lineage behind it. In his classic book *Diplomacy* (1939), Sir Harold Nicolson regrets the confusion created by mixing diplomacy with foreign policy and advocates keeping them apart. Another British diplomat Sir Douglas Busk echoes the same view in his book *The Craft of Diplomacy* (1967) where he says 'policy is not diplomacy'. The trend of mixing the two is more noticeable in the American scholarly works. In his book *Twentieth-Century Diplomacy* (2008), Prof. John W. Young says 'diplomacy' is frequently used as a synonym for 'world affairs' or 'foreign policy' by American authors and scholars and cites Henry Kissinger's *Diplomacy* (1994) as an example, which to him 'is really a history of international relations since the Congress of Vienna'.

The author of *Nepal Worldview* says it was just to manage the bulky content that he separated foreign policy and diplomacy in two volumes, which means it was not his conscious effort to separate them as if they were dichotomous subjects. Interestingly, in the words of one of the most perceptive recent reviewers, Mr Acharya has 'taken a bold step, in the sense that he has attempted a dangerous, if not impossible, task of breaking the realm of foreign affairs into two seemingly water-tight compartments of foreign policy and diplomacy.' (MK Bhattarai, *The Kathmandu Post*, February 15, 2020). And in the opinion of another reviewer of no less repute and recognition, the author 'deserves to be congratulated for conjoining foreign policy and diplomacy.' (Prof. Lok Raj Baral, *The Kathmandu Post*, April 7, 2019). As they say 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder'.

With these preliminary observations, let me begin my exploratory foray into the first volume- Foreign Policy. The author proceeds with the argument that

Nepal is the only nation state in South Asia which has a documented history of more than 2,000 years and obviously the oldest one in the region with its own unbroken existence throughout. He traces the evolution of Nepal's international identity, from the earliest times to the present, in a swift assessment of history and tries to identify the factors that have shaped its worldview. Mr Acharya includes among them Nepal's 'location and a unique mix of cultural values and civilisations' as well as 'historical experiences, economic compulsions and an increasing exposure and contact with the outside world'. He considers it factually misleading to call Nepal a 'small country' while accepting Nepal's unification by King Prithvi Narayan Shah as 'a historical necessity'. He identifies, among others, the 'Hindu-Buddhist worldview' as Nepal's soft power and appears to lament the loss of its Hindu identity in spite of its being a predominantly Hindu country.

Mr Acharya proceeds to explore the changing world order and its multifarious impacts worldwide making him feel that Nepal is also at a 'crossroads of realignment in its traditional worldview.' He says adapting to a rapidly changing external world is among the main challenges of Nepal's foreign policy because geopolitics allows only limited maneuverability to Nepal in its foreign policy options. Mr Acharya advocates eschewing the limiting psychology inherent in the conceptualisation of Nepal as a 'yam between two boulders' and start taking advantage of the immense economic opportunities arising from its strategic location between India and China- the next 'superpowers in the making'. He also foresees political and geopolitical implications for a Hindu majority Nepal when Hindu nationalism rises in India. The author believes that graduation from the LDC group would give Nepal a 'new international economic personality', and for that Nepal needs to 'improve its bargaining power and negotiating skills' and build 'national consensus on foreign policy matters'.

The author refutes the view that 'the concept of international relations (IR) developed almost entirely in the West' and cites the Hindu epic Mahabharata and the Arthashastra in support of his argument. He makes a quick review of international relations theories such as realism, institutionalism, idealism, constructivism, liberalism, neoliberalism, etc. and having acknowledged the absence of a unifying theory, and suggesting that 'no theory of international relations is right or wrong' as these only serve as 'analytical tools for understanding state behaviours in the international arena', he finally refers to the concept of postmodernism as having strong 'influence in all spheres of Nepal's national and international relations'.

In the chapter 'Foreign Policy in a Flux', the author dwells on the evolution of Nepal's foreign policy and its inherent qualities of dynamism and adaptability. He takes us back to the ancient moral precept of basudhaiva kutumbakam to

trace the guiding philosophy of Nepal's foreign policy. In modern times, the characterisation of Nepal by King Prithvi Narayan Shah as a 'yam between two boulders', especially in relation to Nepal's geopolitical location between India and China, remains deeply entrenched in the Nepali psyche, and according to Mr Acharya, it 'still reverberates in Nepal's foreign policy'. He argues that after the unification of Nepal, a threefold strategy of isolation, resistance and appeasement was adopted by the Nepali rulers to preserve national independence up until the end of the Rana era. Only after the advent of democracy in 1951 did the country emerge 'out of the cocoon' of long isolation and opened up to the external world. Bilateral relations began to expand gradually, and Nepal's efforts to get into the United Nations materialised in December 1955.

The author regrets the lack of consensus among the political leaders on foreign policy matters and also the lack of a consensus building mechanism in foreign policy. He considers parliamentary oversight on foreign policy to be weak, and highlighting the existence of 'increasing external interest, influence and meddling in Nepal's internal affairs', he calls upon the foreign policy establishment to draw a red-line to stop that. The author gives a quick review of the evolutionary history of Nepal's foreign policy and diplomacy in the erstwhile unitary state structure and dwells on the likely complications that might arise in the implementation of foreign policy in a newly adopted federal set-up of Nepal. The author believes that a practical review of our foreign policy needs to be undertaken and that a broad-based foreign policy advisory committee headed by the foreign minister could be formed to act as an institutional consultative mechanism. He sees no value in the parliamentary 'hearing' process of just a routine nature, considers the 'yam syndrome' an unrealistic perception in the present context, highlights the need for a transformative overhaul of foreign policy, and calls for ensuring an interest-based, independent, integrated, institutionalised and inclusive foreign policy. He sees the need for energising the Institute of Foreign Affairs as an 'effective' think tank with 'emphasis on academic publications and debates on foreign policy issues'. He believes in the efficacy of 'quiet diplomacy' to resolve issues in Nepal-India relations and says that the EPG's work can be a stepping stone to proceed with the revision of the 1950 Treaty, for which 'Nepal should take the initiative to float a revised draft' as sought by India. He also notes the absence of 'a coherently articulated official foreign policy document' of Nepal.

The author presents a background and evolving security and strategic situation in the regional context on account of the rise of India and China as new economic powers with competitive and rival ambitions, which invite increasing interest of the United States as well. The very fact that three of Nepal's neighbours- India, Pakistan and China- happen to be nuclear powers with deep-rooted rivalries, unresolved boundary issues and a history of wars between them enhances

the likelihood of unexpected flare-ups at any time. International terrorism, a common enemy of all, and a host of other traditional and non-traditional security threats as well as global concerns about the broader agenda of human security also call for closer cooperation in the region. The author analyses the potential security threats to Nepal and highlights the importance of ‘defense diplomacy’. He credits the Chief of Nepal Army with making ‘the final and decisive persuasion’ to get the five-month-long Indian economic blockade lifted in early 2016. He considers the National Defense University proposal a ‘timely and important move’, supports the concept of ‘minimum deterrence’ capability for Nepal, recommends having a ‘comprehensive defense policy’, and maintaining ‘strategic autonomy’ vis-a-vis India and China through a ‘combination of national security and foreign policy’, which he says are ‘two sides of the same coin’. In his view ‘the foreign-policy establishment underestimates the significance of defense diplomacy’ and calls for building an ‘organic link between the foreign policy and national security institutions’. The new constitution identifies Nepal’s national interests, and it is the foremost objective of our foreign and security policies to safeguard them. In pursuing this objective, the author says, the ‘legitimate security interests’ of our neighbours should not be undermined. He approvingly quotes Prof. Y. N. Khanal: ‘Our foreign policy will break down at the point where either India or China loses faith in us and concludes that her vital national interests and sensitivities do not receive proper recognition in our conduct of relations.’ He observes that lack of consensus on issues of national interest because of the ‘polarised worldview’ of the political parties should be corrected by adopting a broadly agreed-upon set of national goals and priorities in foreign policy based on national interest.

Moving on to the region, Mr Acharya says ‘India matters for Nepal in almost everything’ and likens it to a ‘kalpabriksha’ (a proverbial wish-fulfilling tree) at the best of times. He acknowledges that managing relations with India is one of the most challenging aspects of Nepal’s foreign policy, but dismisses it to be ‘Indo-centric’ any more. The author extensively covers the complex and multidimensional nature of Nepal-India relations, making it the longest chapter in the book. Mr Acharya says the search for a separate identity is one of the reasons behind Nepal’s insistence on the review of the 1950 Treaty. He quotes King Birendra’s historic Newsweek interview of 10 September 1973 which highlights Nepal’s quest for this separateness: ‘Nepal is not a part of the Indian subcontinent; it is really that part of Asia which touches both India and China’. He presents three sets of interests between Nepal and India: converging interests (e.g. trade, tourism, investment, economic cooperation); overlapping interests (e.g., security, transit, water resources, peoples’ movement); and diverging or conflicting interests (e.g., disputed boundaries). After considering

the pros and cons, the author advocates a 'managed, not restricted' open border between the two countries. He holds the view that 'Nepal and India need politically discrete and economically integrated relations' in a forward-looking framework, which the EPG could perhaps spell out and recommend. He says 'India is already a global power and is poised to become a superpower soon' for which it 'should take its neighbours into confidence, showing magnanimity without demanding quid pro quo.'

With China, the author gives a brief narrative of ancient connections through pilgrims, traders and travellers and the historical importance of Tibet to Nepal for trade and also as a 'buffer between Nepal and China'. He gives a historical glimpse of the clash of commercial interests with Tibet and the several wars fought on that ground. He refers to the Treaty of Thapathali of 24 March 1856 which, among others, led to the establishment of a Vakil office in Lhasa and, a century later, following establishment of diplomatic relations with China, was turned into a consulate. He gives a quick rundown of the bilateral relations that have progressed since the mid-1950s, including the signing of the boundary treaty and construction of the Kathmandu-Kodari Highway in the 1960s. Although Nepal strictly adheres to the One China policy and considers Tibet as an integral part of the People's Republic of China, 'the Tibet factor constitutes one of the sensitive issues in Nepal-China relations' because of 'the presence of 'Free Tibet' supporters among the Tibetan refugees in Nepal'. The author considers the arrival of the Chinese rail to Nepal's border by 2022 to be a 'great game-changer in its geopolitics'. The signing of a transit treaty and other agreements with China in 2016 will have long-term impacts in terms of 'trade, investment, tourism, energy and connectivity'. Nepal has already joined the AIIB and has signed an MOU to join the BRI as well. The author says China's strategic interests in executing some connectivity and other projects in Nepal should not deter us from utilising Chinese aid if it does not drag Nepal in a geopolitical contest between the two bigger neighbours. The author sees prospects for reducing excessive dependence on India and augmenting its 'strategic choices through trade, transit and connectivity' if recent agreements with China are 'implemented in earnest'.

Immediately beyond the Elephant and the Dragon, the author takes the readers to the extended neighbourhood covering Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, relations with which are dealt with serially in the same chapter. Only the Maldives, a fellow SAARC member, remains unmentioned.

'Thanks to traditional intricacies and emerging geopolitical realities', the author says 'Nepal's relations with the countries in the neighbourhood are beset by triangular formations'. He then proceeds to link the three sides of each triangle into six separate formations, as (i) Nepal-India-China (ii) Nepal-India-Bhutan

(iii) Nepal-India-Bangladesh (iv) Nepal-India-Pakistan (v) Nepal-India-the West (vi) Nepal-China-the West, and tries to analyse each combination in a broader context beyond their bilateral limits. One can easily discern the fact that in five out of the six formations, India remains common. This shows the centrality of India in this scheme of triangular orders. It is only in the sixth triangle that India remains invisible. The author quotes Henry Kissinger who appreciates Nepal for having 'skillfully balanced' its relations with India and China for centuries and safeguarded its national independence in his book *World Order* (2014). But Mr Acharya says this is changing and getting ever more complex as the two 'compete for strategic spaces in the region, including Nepal' and 'both do not want Nepal to come under the sphere of influence of the other'. In addition, China also remains suspicious of Western countries led by the US acting against the interests of China from Nepal.

Moving on to the next chapter, the author says 'Nepal does not have a well-articulated neighbourhood policy' and observes that 'the search for a pragmatic neighbourhood policy constitutes the most important quest in Nepal's foreign policy today'. He cites China's 'BRI' and India's 'Look East Policy' (Prime Minister Modi's 'Act East Policy') as examples and says 'although not necessarily exclusive, these policies have elements of geostrategic competition, which Nepal cannot ignore'.

In spite of SAARC being in existence for over three decades, the author says South Asia remains one of the 'least economically integrated and least cooperating' regions of the world. It is no secret that lack of political will and adversarial relations between India and Pakistan have stymied its progress. The Charter keeps all bilateral and contentious issues from the SAARC forum, and non-resolution of such issues bilaterally between the major member countries keeps SAARC moribund. A prolonged state of immobilisation of SAARC only helps set the stage for subregional activation while the regional body languishes in irrelevance. The author gives a comprehensive picture of SAARC as a regional institution with suggestions for making it more effective and result-oriented. The author also throws light on BIMSTEC and its activities, which too are not very impressive. The SAGQ and the BBIN, initiated as subregional initiatives within SAARC, also have tardy performances.

The US has remained engaged in Nepal through foreign aid and other development programmes since 1951. The Peace Corps volunteers have been a well-known feature of US-Nepal relations since the Kennedy Administration. The author says, 'containment' of China was once the main U.S. strategic interest in Nepal. It waned with the end of the Cold War. Now with the rise of China and India as new 'global powers' U.S. interest in Nepal has also revived, says the author. The US has continuing interest in Tibet and the Tibetan refugees. During the Maoist insurgency, the US supported Nepal with

aid and military assistance. Its interest and support for democracy and human rights remain strong.

With the United Kingdom Nepal's relations are more than two centuries old. The author gives a background of this long association and historical events and activities such as the wars fought between the two, British clandestine efforts to recruit Nepali youths in its army, the Treaty of Sugauli of 1815, the Gurkha connection, royal tours and visits, etc. He narrates the visit of Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana to Britain in April 1850 as the King's 'Ambassador' and links it to his full-fledged support to the British in crushing the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 and getting some of Nepal's lost territory restored in return. Mr Acharya also gives an account of Prime Minister Chandra Shamsheer's visit to Britain in 1908 and the reforms introduced by him in Nepal following the trip. His signing of the 1923 Treaty of Friendship with Britain recognised Nepal for the first time as a sovereign independent nation. Regarding the Sugauli Treaty, in spite of being 'an unequal and one-sided treaty' imposed by the victor upon the vanquished, Mr Acharya says, 'being a boundary treaty, obligations and rights on the boundary between Nepal and India bear international validation' and, therefore, he considers it relevant for 'the delineation of the boundary between Nepal and India'. The significance of the bilateral relations and the support being extended by the UK as an important economic partner have been highlighted with the comment that 'despite the long and enduring relations, the British influence in Nepal is limited' and 'waning' although it 'still matters as an important country in the Nepal worldview'.

The European Union remains the 'largest development partner of Nepal' and also a beneficiary of its unique trade concession measure called 'Everything But Arms' offered to the LDCs. The author says although Nepal is not on the EU's 'list of priority countries for development assistance', 'it regards Nepal as an important 'partner country' and 'has significant engagements in Nepal in the area of democracy and human rights' as well as in 'peace building and conflict resolution'. The author says while the EU adopts a 'soft approach' to aid, it is 'not an easy partner to work with' and sometimes its 'prescriptive approach to Nepal's domestic issues related to democracy, human rights and social inclusion creates controversy in Nepal'. The author observes, 'the Eurozone Crisis and Brexit Vote have exposed the vulnerability of the EU project' and that its influence is in decline in the world.

Nepal continues to reach out to the world by expanding its diplomatic network and relations. The author refers to some of the recent openings of Nepal's diplomatic missions in countries like Australia, Austria, Brazil, Denmark, Spain, South Africa and South Korea and proceeds to give updates on the bilateral relations with France, Russia, Japan, Germany, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, Australia, Israel, New Zealand, Belgium, Canada, Denmark,

Norway, Finland and South Korea in that order.

The last part of Vol. I covers Nepal's multilateral relations and its role in the multilateral arena beginning with the admission to the United Nations in 1955 after which, the author says, Nepal was able to reaffirm its 'international identity as an independent nation' and also acquired 'a new space in global politics' which 'heralded an altogether new era of diversification in Nepal's foreign policy'. Nepal utilises 'the UN forum for articulating its positions and views on major international issues' and 'has earned appreciation for its involvement in the UN's various programmes and activities, including in its peacekeeping operations', says the author. He quotes Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar who praised Nepal during his visit in 1989 as 'a shining example of how a small country can make a contribution to world peace'. He gives an extensive survey of Nepal's roles and relations within the UN system and its views and positions on how the organisation could be made more timely, more effective and more encompassing by undertaking some essential reforms so as not to let this 'indispensable common house of the entire human family' get marginalised into a state of irrelevance.

'Helmets from the Himalayas' gives the glorious record of Nepal's long involvement in the UN peacekeeping missions which began with the participation of five Nepali military personnel in the UN Observer Group in Lebanon in 1958. Nepal has so far provided 'more than 120,000 Nepal Army troops' in 42 missions across the world. Nepal has been among the top 10 troop contributing countries and 'as of 2015, some 63 Nepali army personnel have laid down their lives' for international peace. In addition, Nepal has a standby arrangement for 5,000 troops with the UN and runs a peace operations training centre at Panchkhal. Mr Acharya says peacekeeping had to be 'invented out of necessity' as it was not conceived in the UN Charter, and considers Nepal's participation in the UN peacekeeping missions as its 'signature role in the UN'. He gives an updated analysis of the various aspects of UN peacekeeping missions, causes of their successes and failures as well as problems and challenges, doctrinal as well as operational, faced by them. He briefly touches upon the evolutionary history of peacekeeping from the traditional to the robust phase and its multidimensional nature. He also gives a brief summary of various reports which recommend ways to streamline peace operations and make them more effective and efficient. He thinks the peace operations centre at Panchkhal should be developed as a South Asian regional centre in partnership with the UN and calls for more emphasis on preventive diplomacy.

Non-alignment remains an important basis of Nepal's foreign policy. Non-alignment emerged as a movement in the context of the Cold War rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union and their competition to create and expand their respective spheres of influence in the world. Prof. Y. N. Khanal called it a 'historical necessity for all emerging and developing nations'. With 120 member nations, 17 observer countries and 10 observer organisations, NAM has become a huge and 'loosely organised movement', says the author, having neither a charter nor a permanent secretariat. He says Nepal had to join NAM also 'to stay away from the power rivalry of two regional powers', India and China, and to 'maintain 'equidistance' between them. Mr Acharya appears to be holding a somewhat indeterminate position about the continuing usefulness of NAM when at one place he observes non-alignment 'has lost the necessary appeal for Nepal to remain there' and at another he says 'Nepal should strive to utilise the NAM as a forum to enhance its multilateral diplomacy'.

One inevitable outcome of adopting a non-isolationist foreign policy and becoming an active member of multinational organisations like the UN is that such states often have to agree to be bound by an increasing number of international instruments of various kinds. Since the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990, successive governments of Nepal were quick to accede to numerous international human rights instruments without thinking much about meeting the obligations arising from them. The author says Nepal often lags behind in implementing the provisions of international treaties and conventions 'to the point of serious embarrassment' to the state. He suggests that hasty accession decisions should be avoided. The state should do serious study before becoming a party to international instruments of a binding nature. And once it becomes a party it should put in place its national implementing mechanism, enact the domestic legislation as necessary, and strengthen the reporting capability.

Being a party to '24 international human rights instruments, including nine core human rights treaties and conventions' puts Nepal on the international radar screen. These require periodic reporting and domestic legislations for implementation. There are some other human rights-related instruments like the ones about migrant workers, stateless persons, refugees, enforced disappearances, etc., of which Nepal is not a party yet. Nepal has also not signed the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998). Human rights community and NGOs have been lobbying to put pressure on Nepal to sign these instruments. Already there is the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which keeps a close eye on the human rights situation in each member

country. Being a recent post-conflict country, Nepal is under the scrutiny of international human rights institutions and mechanisms. Addressing alleged cases of human rights violations and impunity is important as it could also have a bearing on Nepal's peacekeepers. The international community also keeps watch of the status and working environment of national human rights institutions as defenders of human rights within the country.

The author refers to the 'first' case of 'political asylum' in the last quarter of the 18th century when a Tibetan Lama was granted political asylum by Nepal. Although Nepal has not become a party to any of the refugee-related international instruments, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and its Protocol, it has allowed Tibetan and Bhutanese refugees to live in Nepal for decades. The author holds the view that 'becoming a party to the UN refugee convention would strengthen the legal framework for Nepal's commitment to provide humanitarian treatment to the refugees'. He also refers to the extreme sensitivity of the Western countries towards the refugees, particularly of the US towards the Tibetans, which sometimes becomes a bilateral issue as well. He provides an explanation about the so-called 'Gentleman's Agreement' between Nepal and the US on the handling of Tibetan asylum seekers and of the long bilateral process that Nepal had engaged in with Bhutan in an attempt to resolve the issue of the Bhutanese refugees, which unfortunately did not succeed because of Bhutanese intransigence and denial. As a result, more than 100,000 Bhutanese refugees have had to move to several Western countries, a majority of them to the US, under a third country resettlement programme.

Nepal is a strong advocate of general and complete disarmament at the UN and other multilateral forums, but the author is probably right in saying that disarmament does not feature in the day-to-day agenda of Nepal's foreign policy'. As a party to the NPT, the author says, Nepal 'stands for the total elimination of all nuclear weapons in a time-bound manner'. Nepal has also become a party to the Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention. Nepal has signed the CTBT in 1996 but has yet to ratify it. The Arms Trade Treaty adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2013 and the Mine-ban Convention of 1997 have, however, not been signed by Nepal yet for some domestic reasons. Nepal stands in support of micro-disarmament or control of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Nepal has been hosting the UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific since 2008. The Kathmandu Process initiated by the Centre aims to promote dialogue and initiatives towards regional disarmament. Nepal also supports regional treaties establishing peace zones, including the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace.

The second volume *Diplomacy* begins with Part V: Nepal's Diplomacy. Mr Acharya views diplomacy as 'an instrument of national power' and considers foreign policy and diplomacy to be complementary to each other. He refutes the view that diplomacy is almost entirely a Western contribution to the world by citing references from the ancient Hindu epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata, which contain early instances of the use of envoys and messengers as well as the then prevalent practice of personal immunity accorded to them while on such missions. He also refers to an ancient treatise on governance and administration, the Arthashastra of Kautilya, which also elaborates on the mechanics of interstate relations and the use of ambassadors. Giving a brief history of the evolution of diplomacy from ancient Greece to the modern times, including a quick introduction to modern diplomatic law and other relevant matters, he notes 'a huge gap between the theory and practice of diplomacy' and briefly refers to three theories of diplomacy: traditional, nascent, and innovative. He also feels the need for a separate Consular Services Act.

Moving on, he traces an evolutionary history of Nepal's Foreign Ministry from Jaisi Kotha and Munsiri Khana to its present form and notes that 'Nepal's diplomatic machinery is under-represented, under-resourced and under-utilised' adding it is marred by a 'diplomatic deficit' because of scanty and minimal diplomatic presence abroad. He metaphorically likens a Nepali diplomat's functions to a fakir's begging bowl. He sees 'a clear need for a separate Foreign Service Act' so as to meet its specific requirements as a specialised service and its further professionalisation. Mr Acharya decries the practice of appointing people without diplomatic skills and aptitude as ambassadors and recommends forming a selection committee headed by the foreign minister to avoid likely embarrassments from inappropriate ambassadorial appointments. He also says 'in keeping with international practice, Nepal should consider appointing Consuls General from the Foreign Service'. He laments that Nepal's diplomacy is in 'decline', and 'so are its diplomatic institutions'. He sees a clear need for reorientation of Nepal's 'foreign policy and diplomatic machinery'. Mr. Acharya stands for a stronger, more proactive, more resourceful, and more efficient foreign ministry to meet the emerging new challenges and changing working environments, both within the country and abroad.

Diplomacy is all about negotiation, and the author very aptly calls it a 'give and take process'. He gives a bird's eye view of the various earlier bilateral treaties and agreements, not all of which were done either on an equal footing or with an adequate amount of diplomatic and negotiating skills on the Nepali

side. He outlines some theoretical aspects of negotiation and also talks about the skills, strategies and tactics of diplomatic negotiations, an appropriate mix of which can elicit the desired concessions from the other side even by a small and apparently weaker negotiating partner. The author notes a lack of communication and articulation skills in Nepali diplomats in addition to the absence of adequate preparation, homework and team spirit. 'Most importantly', the author says, 'Nepal's diplomats need subject expert skills, and subject experts need diplomatic and legal skills', which he thinks 'are very important in every negotiation'.

The author considers the first Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia in early 1955 as Nepal's first experience in multilateral diplomacy and a precursor to the rise of the Non-aligned Movement. Later that year Nepal entered the United Nations. Then followed a rapid process of Nepal's multilateral engagement. The author highlights multilateral diplomacy's importance in addressing common global problems, often known as 'problems without passports', which require multilateral solutions. He also notes various challenges faced by multilateralism, including the one posed by occasional reversion to unilateralism by the only remaining superpower. He considers multilateral diplomacy as an important tool for promoting national interest by a country like Nepal and calls for creating a multilateral career track in the Foreign Service to build a strong foundation for preparing professionally sound and competent multilateral diplomats.

In Part VI of his book, Ambassador Acharya deals with Nepal's Economic and Development Diplomacy. Narrating the history of Nepal's aggressive efforts to protect and promote its trade and economic interests since medieval times, the author refers to the opening of the Vakil's Office in Lhasa as Nepal's first foreign mission in 1856. Its main function was to facilitate Nepali traders and promote Nepal's economic interests. After eschewing the isolationist policy in the early 1950s, Nepal opened up for tourism, trade and industrialisation to the outside world. With the arrival of a new wave of economic liberalisation, Nepal adopted 'economic diplomacy' as an important component of its foreign policy agenda, which, in Ambassador Acharya's terms, has since become 'a new mantra in the country's diplomatic strategy'. And economic diplomacy now covers areas such as 'trade, investment, foreign employment, tourism and foreign aid'. In spite of the importance given to economic diplomacy by the government, the author says Nepal's economic diplomacy lacks 'strategic direction' and suffers from 'ambitious goals without commensurate resources and action plan'. It is also afflicted with the 'diplomatic deficit' of 'understaffed,

under-represented and under-utilised' diplomatic machinery. He highlights the existing institutional weaknesses in the conduct of economic diplomacy and calls for a revamp of the institutional mechanism for economic diplomacy and reorient it with a programmatic focus in partnership with the private sector. He also proposes making use of diaspora diplomacy in support of economic diplomacy.

The author says since the 1990s, Nepal has adopted several outward-oriented economic policies within an open, liberal and market-friendly economic policy regime. The Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Act was introduced as early as 1992. Double taxation agreements have been signed with several countries. In 2004, Nepal became the first LDC to join the WTO after its coming into existence a decade earlier. Efforts are also under way to boost trade and economic linkages and benefits under SAARC and BIMSTEC.

Mr Acharya sees a lack of 'strong programmatic backing' in Nepal's vision to graduate from the LDC group by 2022. He dwells on the criteria to be met before an LDC qualifies for full and final graduation. Although he notes some post-graduation pangs in terms of lost benefits, he observes that 'exiting from the Poor Man's Club can be a matter of pride and confidence in Nepal's trajectory of socio-economic development' leading further towards the level of a middle income country by 2030.

The author dwells on the predicaments of Nepal as a landlocked country under the heading 'The Prisoner of Geography' and begins by recollecting the five-month-long 'unannounced blockade' Nepal had to face from its neighbour. The author identifies landlockedness as 'the single most important factor' that shapes the Nepali worldview. He also calls it 'a major barrier to Nepal's development and a major impediment to its outward orientation'. Being both landlocked and least developed at the same time is, to him, a 'double jeopardy'. He characterises the latest blockade as 'apolitical, undiplomatic, uneconomic and inhuman at the same time'. He dwells on a number of international instruments establishing unhindered transit rights to the landlocked countries, but these often turn out to be 'imperfect rights', 'as they depend upon the mercy of the transit states'. He considers transit through China, a new prospect opened following the signing of a new transit treaty in 2016, as 'a distant dream' which will take time to materialise. But the author thinks Nepal's strategic geopolitical location can bring the benefits of better trade and transit opportunities between India and China.

As a member of the G77, Nepal enjoys the benefit of being in the largest forum of developing countries at the UN. The G77 played a crucial role in

getting the Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order (1974) and the Declaration on the Right to Development (1986) adopted by the UN General Assembly. Being a huge group of 135 countries of many different interests and identities, the author says the group is rather unwieldy and ineffective. North-South Cooperation that began in the 1980s is at a 'crossroads', says the author, because the developed North feels 'aid-fatigue' and nurtures a feeling of competition against the developing countries. More recently, cooperation among the developing countries themselves has taken the form of South-South Cooperation, which would be complementary to North-South Cooperation. The author says so far Nepal has taken a back seat in the G77 and on the agenda of South-South Cooperation, but calls upon Nepal to begin taking a proactive role in the G77.

The author gives an account of Nepal's long association with the World Bank Group, which remains Nepal's major development partner since the early 1960s. Their support has been significant in the areas of poverty reduction, structural adjustment, balance of payments stabilisation, infrastructure development, economic liberalisation, etc. Founded in the 1940s, the World Bank and IMF are often criticised for being dominated by the West and unresponsive to the calls for reform in keeping with the current global context. The author wants Nepal to 'engage the Bretton Woods Institutions more in the areas of infrastructure development and capacity building rather than on softer issues like economic liberalisation or poverty alleviation'.

The author thinks Nepal's economic diplomacy is getting a new impetus by the introduction of a broader concept of development diplomacy. He infers this from the changed nomenclature and focus of the Foreign Ministry's erstwhile Economic Diplomacy and NRN Division, which is now known as Policy Planning, Development Diplomacy and Overseas Nepalese Affairs Division. The author presents different understandings of the term development diplomacy in different countries and himself applies development diplomacy to include 'negotiations, follow up and implementation of the international development agenda, including those agreed at the United Nations'. He discusses the MDGs, SDGs, the right to development and climate change action as important aspects of the development diplomacy agenda for Nepal.

Nepal became the first LDC to accede to the WTO agreements in 2004 following the establishment of the World Trade Organisation in 1994. It pledges to be a 'rules-based' and 'non-discriminatory' multilateral trading framework. But there are issues such as labour mobility under the trade negotiations, which have not made much progress because of differences between the positions

of the developed and developing countries. Given the complex nature of the trade negotiations, the author suggests that Nepal's trade-related negotiating capability be enhanced.

The author presents Nepal's water resources as 'the white gold', 'the best hope for transforming Nepal's economic future' through the export of power to India. But to him 'it is already the most complicated subject' in Nepal-India relations. Given the controversies surrounding most of the past water resources agreements with India as being lopsided, the author suggests Nepal 'strengthen its water diplomacy, focusing on the negotiating capacity and policy environment for investment in the sector' and avoid being in a situation of a 'resource curse'. In his view, 'like all other sectors, the exploitation of Nepal's water resources has been stymied by domestic politics and the inherent weakness in negotiations with India'.

Nepal's long dependence on foreign aid despite of being a resource-rich country is expressed beautifully by the author with a tinge of irony as 'Begging with a Golden Bowl'. Development cooperation constitutes one of the five identified areas of economic diplomacy, and here the author quotes the seasoned view of Prof. Y. N. Khanal: 'Aid is a friend, not a master of foreign policy'. Unfortunately, in the author's view, the problem with Nepal's foreign aid diplomacy is that 'aid is used as a political tool' by the donors and 'is mostly donor-driven'. 'Aid mobilisation remains disjointed from Nepal's foreign policy and its economic diplomacy efforts' observes the author, and suggests that the Foreign Ministry be consulted and involved in all aid negotiations and agreements. He notices a serious lacking in internal coordination despite the existence of several high-level monitoring and coordinating bodies. He also discusses various other problems that afflict foreign aid management in Nepal. The author's final chapter of the second volume relates to Nepali migrant workers and the diaspora. He begins by linking the inspiration for continuous movement and action to the Vedic counsel of Charaiveti Charaiveti. He takes the readers back to the early 19th century when Nepali youths began to join King Ranjit Singh's army in Punjab and were first deputed to a place called Lahore from whence came the term 'Lahure' in Nepali. The author considers migrant workers and the global Nepali diaspora as an important element in shaping the Nepali worldview. He gives a harrowing account of the experiences of Nepali migrant workers abroad and their exploitation at every step by unscrupulous agents and middlemen. He groups Nepali migrants into five broad categories, of which the most influential category happens to be the Non-Resident Nepalis (NRNs) who have been recognised officially by the government under the Non-

Resident Nepali Act 2007 and even by the new constitution of Nepal. As a major chunk of national income comes from remittance, the author points out the need to improve and strengthen Nepal's labour diplomacy and its diaspora diplomacy to make the most out of the prevalent opportunities. He alerts that remittance benefits are only ephemeral.

The book under review is undoubtedly the most comprehensive of all currently available books on Nepal's foreign policy and diplomacy. No small amount of time, energy, effort and experience combined into a ceaseless quest for scholarly excellence could have produced this magnum opus. However, even this impressive work is not completely free from some weaknesses and shortcomings. Notwithstanding its formidable size and comprehensiveness, it fails to give adequate space and coverage to consular relations and diplomatic law.

Typographic errors and editorial lapses abound. Misspelt proper names, misnamed international instruments, misdating of events and activities and misquotations are also found. The text suffers from repetitions here and there. There is also a lack of uniformity on important historical dates, facts and events. Nepal's unification year is not uniformly presented (pp. 4, 5, 19, 82, 319, and 518). Figures about Nepal's diplomatic relations and its residential missions vary at various places (pp. 105, 360, 522, 523, 531). The original sayings 'jasko tarwar usko durbar' and 'charai jat chhattisai varnako phulbari' have both been wrongly presented as 'jasko durbar usko tarwar' (p. 36) and as 'char varna chattis jatko phulbari' (p. 24). The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), from which President Donald Trump had the United States withdrawn, has been misnamed as Trans-Atlantic Trade Partnership (p. 57). President Barack Obama's 2012 announcement about a shift in his Administration's focus from the Atlantic to the Pacific has been wrongly transposed as 'from the Pacific to the Atlantic' (p. 323). George Everest did not name 'Peak XV' nor was it named Mt. Everest in 1965, as claimed by the author (p. 344). The name Everest was proposed in 1856 by Andrew Waugh in honour of his already retired predecessor for 'Peak XV'. The author says 'koot' means poison in Sanskrit (p. 491). Dictionaries don't corroborate it. There are confusingly diverse references about the date of establishment of 'Nepal's first diplomatic mission abroad' in Lhasa and the designation of the office holder (pp. 205, 518, 587, 609). Nepali historians are not unanimous about Bhrikuti being the daughter of Amshuvarma (p.5, 203). In addition to these, there are some other flaws of a more serious nature in the book. Contrary to what the author says on pages 84, 238 and 337-338, Nepal had not agreed to allow Gurkha recruitment by the Treaty of Sugauli.

In fact, the text of the Treaty of Sugauli does not say anything at all about Gurkha recruitment. It was not a ‘commercial treaty’ under which the first British Resident to Nepal was appointed (p. 331). The author says Article 8 of the 1950 Treaty ‘cancels all previous treaties, agreements and engagements’ (p. 334). It is a flawed interpretation because it ignores the restrictive clause ‘As far as matters dealt with herein are concerned’ that precedes the quoted text. The author’s claim that the Nepal-Britain Treaty of 1923 was the first such treaty deposited by Nepal with the League of Nations in 1925 (p. 337) appears *prima facie* untenable. Not being a member of the League, it was not mandatory for Nepal to register the treaty at the League secretariat. Even the 1950 Treaty with India was not registered at the United Nations by Nepal. The Final Act of Vienna of 1815 did not establish ‘four classes of heads of missions’ as the author says (p. 495). It had established only three classes: ambassadors, legates or nuncios; envoys accredited to sovereigns; and charge d’affaires accredited to ministers of foreign affairs. It was at Aix-la-Chapelle in 1818 that a fourth class- ministers-resident- was added. In spite of these and some other shortcomings of a more technical nature encountered in the book, there is no doubt that *Nepal Worldview* is a monumental work of its kind on Nepal’s foreign policy and diplomacy. Its author deserves unqualified admiration for accomplishing such a meritorious enterprise. It has set a certain standard which all future writers on Nepal’s foreign policy and diplomacy would have to take into account. The great 14th century English poet and author Geoffrey Chaucer had famously observed: ‘If gold ruste, what shall iren do?’ A revised new edition would be a highly welcome endeavour.

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