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BUSINESS 360°

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STRIKE BACK

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COMMODITIES
SUPERCYCLE

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WITH WOMEN
IN TECH

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Living in uncertain times, it pays to be resilient and flexible in the face of changes that are today occurring at super speed. What began as an unknown virus that gripped the world in fear brought out some of the best and worst moments in humanity. It showed the world its interconnectedness; it also showed us that we were equally vulnerable despite our geographies, economies, colour or race. It showed us the strength of collaboration and the need for empathy and engagement as a way of life. And in times of deep uncertainty, it showed us that where we are standing in the current time is not nearly as important as what direction we choose to move in.

Lives were sadly lost and the pain of those who got left behind with tragic memories can barely be comprehended. Hopes were raised as people who fought the virus and came out healthy shared their stories. Then they were those who put on their battle dress each day to save lives in hospitals and clinics and those who toiled in the labs to find answers. Economies were shattered and people lost livelihoods... the effects were multiple and came without relief. The vaccine came and raised questions on the chasm between people who have and those who don't. Reports state that on average in high income countries one in four people have received a vaccine while the numbers in low income countries stand at one in over 500.

And again we stand on the verge of a second wave that Nepal can ill afford. It is already a raging inferno of an outbreak in several countries and a sign that we simply must not ignore. With the emergence of new mutations and variants of Covid 19 and the conflicting news that you ingest every day and try to make some sense of, the government and political leaders must place priority on finding solutions that work and work proactively to initiate protocols that help keep people safe and the economy secure.

Does it really matter who runs the government? Does it matter who the PM is? Does it matter which party is the most powerful? I don't think any of these things matter to the common man who has bills to pay, mouths to feed, and work to do to simply exist. The virus is just an additional threat when you don't know where your next meal will come from.

What would matter now is how the political parties align to work together, join forces and collaborate, create common agendas and show true leadership that comes from compassion and wisdom not pseudo intelligence and competitiveness.

As we look forward into time, the world may not have enough to give to Nepal. It's time that she is allowed to flourish by finding and fostering her own strengths. Its time leadership responded effectively with clarity, resilience and collaboration to find solutions that truly matter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charu Chadha', written over a horizontal line.

Charu Chadha
editor

BIZ INDICATORS

FOREX MARKET	09.04.2021	09.03.2021	Year ago
USD	119.05	116.91	121.90
GBP	163.62	161.62	150.73
Chinese Renminbi (Yuan)	18.18	17.91	17.26
Indian Rupee (INR 100)	160.00	160.00	160.00
Euro	141.23	138.82	132.59
Australian Dollar	-	-	-
GOVERNMENT SECURITIES	Lowest	Highest	Weighted Avg.
Discount rate of T-bill (Subject to latest issuance)			
Treasury bills (28 days)	0.860	0.490	0.704
Treasury bills (91 days)	1.490	1.490	1.490
Treasury bills (182 days)	2.930	2.440	2.701
Treasury bills (364 days)	-	-	-
PRICE INDICES	Feb20/21(p)	Feb19/20(p)	Feb18/19(p)
National Consumer Price Index (base year 2014/15 = 100)	136.34	132.76	124.22

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I always remind myself that the ecosystem is always greater than an individual. I strongly feel that I can do much better here in Nepal at an ecosystem and impact level.

Dr. Prativa Pandey
Founder & CEO, Catalyst Technology and Herveda Botanicals

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नव वर्ष २०७८ को शुभकामना

नयाँ वर्ष २०७८ को अवसरमा सम्पूर्ण ग्राहक महानुभाव तथा शुभेच्छुक लगायत सम्पूर्ण नेपाली समुदायमा सुख, शान्ति, सम्बृद्धि एवं उत्तरोत्तर प्रगतिको हार्दिक मंगलमय शुभकामना व्यक्त गर्दछौं ।



IN THE LEAD

**BISHNU RIMAL
THE FORMIDABLE
STRATEGIST**

**THE CHIEF ADVISOR TO
PM KP SHARMA OLI**



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**CRITICAL ECONOMIC RECOVERY
& HEALTHCARE DELIVERY
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**“ONE HAS TO BE PERSISTENT AND
SMART TO SEE WHAT IS ACTUALLY GOING
ON. BUSINESS IS NOT A PLACE FOR
BEING DELUSIONAL.”**

RACHAEL MANLEY
Director, Imago Dei Café Gallery

ETC

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**FDI IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR
NEED OR GREED?**

FEATURE



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“A good leader should realise that it is not about you but you have to know yourself. You have to know what you don't do well and you have to figure out what to do with that. Sometimes that means bringing other people who do those things well that you don't do well.”



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THE GOVERNMENT IS VERY EXCITED ABOUT FNCCI HAVING THIS COMMITTEE SO THEY ARE SUPPORTING US; THEY ARE COLLABORATING WITH US FOR GETTING THE POLICY IN PLACE; BRINGING IT ONBOARD AND GETTING SOME POLICIES CORRECTED LIKE FDI FOR STARTUPS RIGHT NOW BEGINS AT RS 5 CRORES PLUS. WE ARE TRYING TO BRING IT DOWN TO RS 50 LAKHS. THAT WAY MANY STARTUPS CAN GET SEED FUND FROM OUTSIDE.

RANJIT RAJ ACHARYA

CEO, Prisma Advertising & Chairperson, Startup & Innovation Committee of FNCCI

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PRANAYA RATNA STHAPIT

Director – Mobile Business, Samsung Nepal

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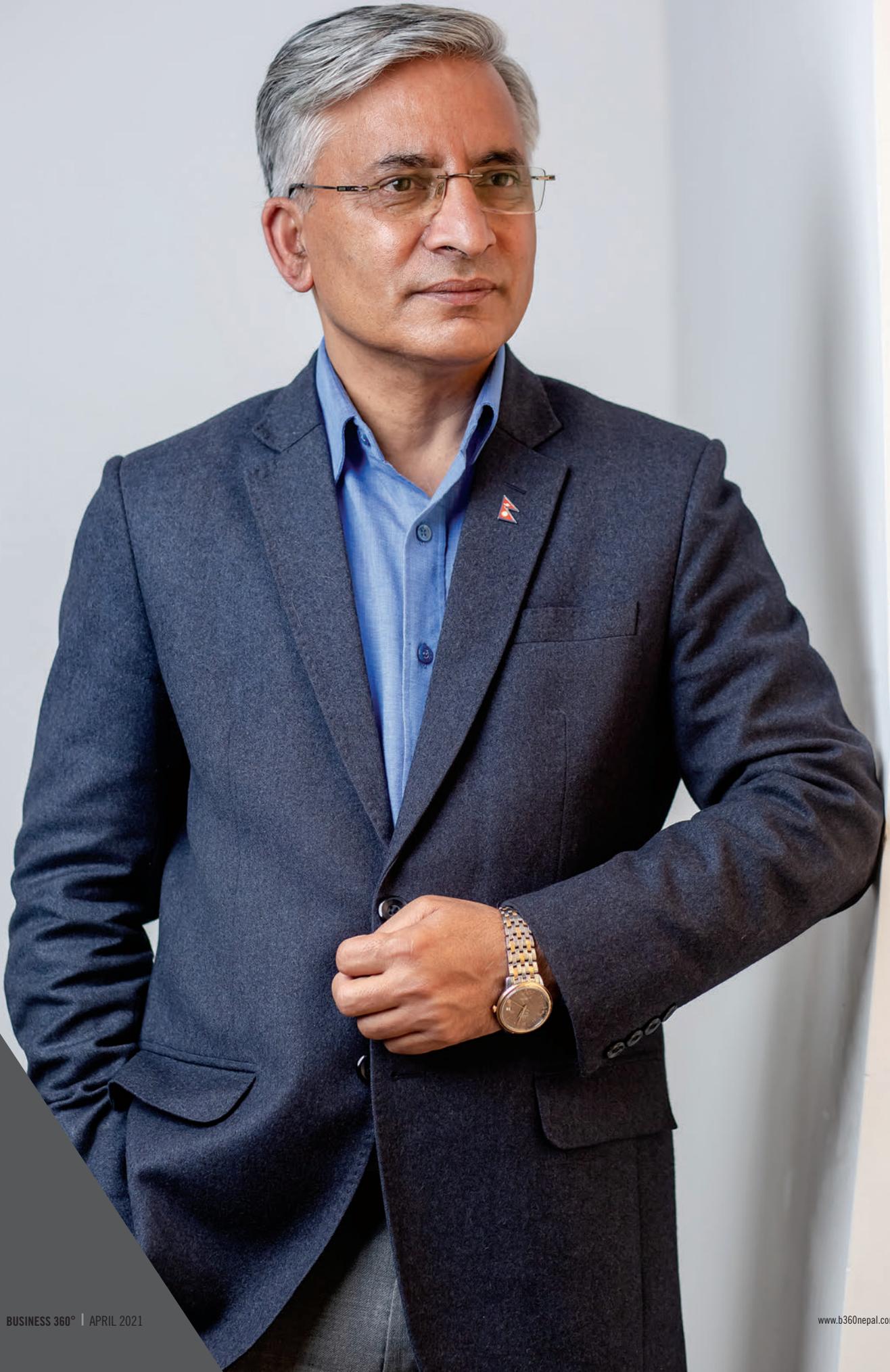
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BISHNU RIMAL

THE FORMIDABLE STRATEGIST

Against the backdrop of instability in the ruling party, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli-led government stands at critical crossroads which will define whether his regime continues or not. Coalition and collaboration in politics and governance have always been mired in power play and vested interests. It is not surprising then that the current government may not complete its term despite having had a clear majority during the general elections. Controversies abound and even the Supreme Court is drawn into the drama that has been unfolding over the past months. The people's mandate in the electoral process now seems to be just a formality as the country watches political events unfold.

We cannot forget that we are in the midst of a global health pandemic that is claiming lives and showing no signs of abating completely. As a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, we are also in the midst of an economic downturn unlike anything that has occurred before. What are the government's priorities at this time? What does the current political instability tell us about our leaders? What are the implications of the political scenario on the economy? Who is answerable to the public? And what exactly has the PM Oli-led government achieved in his term?

The Chief Advisor to PM KP Sharma Oli, Bishnu Rimal is ostensibly the mind behind some of the PM's major political decisions. Rimal entered into politics through the student movement in 1979 and joined the then underground Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist). Rimal is also the current patron of the trade union confederation having provided leadership to the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) as its founding Secretary General. Rimal has had a long and interesting career in the politics, actively involved in the CPN UML for over 35 years. A civil engineer by profession, he is soft spoken with a steely resolve, someone who chooses not to shine the light on himself, but a clear political strategist.

We asked Rimal for answers. While we didn't get answers to some key issues, we do get perspective of where the leading government stands on the upcoming budget, bureaucracy and the big ticket infrastructure projects.

Excerpts of a conversation with **Business 360**:



Two major communist parties of the country have formed the government to work as per the joint manifesto issued in the 2017 elections. The root of dissatisfaction is reportedly PM Oli-led government's disorientation from the manifesto and an authoritarian style of running the government. How do you view these allegations?

The government works as per its policies and programs tabled in the parliament every year and the fiscal budget is framed based on that. The policies and programs are aligned with the

election manifesto. What we are doing now is fully aligned with the joint manifesto that was issued in 2017 general election. We should understand that the government functions based on the major guiding principles of periodic plans (National Plan), manifesto of the ruling party that are aligned through policies and programs of the government, and required resources to execute the plan allocated through the fiscal budget. Manifesto of the party, policies and programs and fiscal budget are aligned to each other. We have published a booklet titled 'The Beginning of Prosperity' after completion of first two years of incumbent

government led by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli. If you see it, you will understand that the targets of the government were carried from the manifesto. It has also presented the action matrix regarding the execution of policies and programs along with the expenses and allocation of resources in each program. The government is determined to work as per its vision; there is no truth behind the allegations that the government is derailed from its commitment to Nepali people.

The Prime Minister had set a vision at the onset of his office titled: 'Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali'.

How do you assess progress in line with the slogan?

We had to begin working from scratch when the Prime Minister assumed office and he had the herculean task of executing fiscal federalism. The country had entered into the federal set up and election was carried out accordingly, however all the structures had to be equipped with legal frameworks, resources and other things to bring them into full-fledged function. When we had given the slogan 'Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali', it was more a vision at that time in absence of mechanisms that could execute it. We had yet to embark on

We introduced 16 laws to be executed around the 32 fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution by September 19, 2018 within a defined deadline.

second year would lay the foundations of prosperity, and the third year would accelerate prosperity.

Legal infrastructures were developed. We have made adjustment of more than 55,000 civil servants as per the federal setup, carried out trainings for them, provincial assembly was formed through election of 2017 but the physical infrastructure like assembly building, government buildings, vehicles, quarters were sorely lacking at the provincial level. Everything related to the execution of federalism including fiscal federalism was successfully completed within a year. I have no reference of any country in the world executing an entire federal setup including fiscal federalism within a year.

We had announced accelerating prosperity after the second year of the government running. At a time when we were set to expedite project executions, service delivery, bring in investments, we started facing internal conflict within the ruling party. Additionally the Covid 19 pandemic was rapidly spreading across the globe and posed a big threat to us as well.

We should not be disappointed by the achievements of this government. I can give examples with evidences of so much that has been achieved. Around 2,700 km of blacktopped roads have been constructed in the last three years. Large numbers of motorable bridges, suspension bridges have been made. Citing an example of the global indices, Nepal has performed well. We can see Nepal's rank in the World Happiness Index, the Human Development Index,

Doing Business Index among others. We are the second country in South Asia to roll out the vaccination program against Covid 19. We have launched immunisation campaign within one and a half months after its first global launch. Nepal ranked in the top 10 countries in terms of inoculation when compared to size of population. These are strong evidences to our claim and commitment of working to attain the vision of prosperity and happiness for our people.

Recently, the Melamchi Water Supply Project which was long awaited dream of Kathmandu valley denizens has been completed. Will this set a precedence to expedite other large scale infrastructure projects?

The government has geared up to complete the big-ticket projects under construction. The policies and programs for fiscal 2021-22 will also give high priority to complete large-scale projects. Many of the critics question 'what are the new projects of this government'. We have the vision of linking Nepal with modern railway from the northern and southern part with both neighbours, India and China. We have prioritised strategic and critical infrastructure looking into the long term future of the country like inland waterways, electricity transmission lines among others. We have intervened in the structural impediments of project execution.

If we look into the past, the governments then were competing to award contracts without clearance of project sites, land compensation and other necessary ground work that used to delay project construction. The rampant resource allocation without project preparedness - detailed project report (DPR), site clearance, formation of special purpose entity to execution - was a major barrier.

I would like to cite the example of Melamchi Water

Supply Project, where the previous contractor had fled when the tunnel of the project was near completion. Despite this unexpected situation, we brought another contractor through the bidding process without disturbing the ongoing works. Likewise, we are able to construct the much talked about Motihari-Amlekhganj petroleum pipeline that has substantially reduced the cost of transportation of fuel (two billion rupees per annum), mitigated other risks as well reduced traffic congestion at the Birgunj checkpoint because of fuel tankers. Almost every government in the last two decades were talking about installing pipeline to import fuel from India, however the project is now completed in 17 months since we commenced work. This pipeline project was jointly initiated by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and his Indian counterpart Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. Integrated Check Post (ICP) Biratnagar came into operation and construction works of ICP in Nepalgunj has already begun. Similarly, we are trying our best for power commissioning from Upper Tamakoshi (456 MW) by mid May. Other big-ticket projects like Gautam Buddha International Airport, Pokhara Regional International Airport will be accomplished timely. If you see, the pace of reconstruction works, our heritage sites are rising from the rubble, Ranipokhari reconstruction has been completed, Dharahara reconstruction will be completed shortly. Another major pride project initiated by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli is the Sunkoshi-Marin diversion, this includes diverting the water of Sunkoshi river to Bagmati through Marin Khola for irrigating the terai plains of Eastern Nepal along with construction of irrigation canals. This is multipurpose project with plans to generate electricity along with irrigation. Apart from this, the country has started tunnel road projects;

a new administrative system under federalism, there was confusion and debate on various issues of power decentralisation and delegation, overlaps between federal and subnational governments, we had to finalise at least one Bill every five days to develop the legal infrastructures first. We introduced 16 laws to be executed around the 32 fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution by September 19, 2018 within a defined deadline.

After assuming office, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli had said that the first year would be the base year for all those arrangements, the



The size of economy is also expanded to almost four trillion rupees, we will be a five trillion rupee economy in the next few years, that's why we should invest in human resource to achieve our long-term goals.

construction of Nagdhunga-Naubise tunnel has gathered pace, we are going to construct other tunnel projects as well namely Syafrubesi-Betrabati tunnel road, Tokha-Chhahare, Siddhababa-Dovan and others. For the timely and successful completion of such development projects, the government needs qualified human resource.

We often hear from the public sphere that bureaucracy must be improved to deliver.

To make that happen, they need proper trainings and skills on the job. We have Administrative Staff College to conduct training of civil servants, we have felt the dire

need of such staff colleges for civil servants allied with technical jobs. The government is going to hire more than a thousand engineers. People may ask about the long-term liability of hiring more staffs, we were having similar number of technical human resource when the size of fiscal budget was just one trillion rupees, it has expanded over the years to almost 1.6 trillion rupees. Similarly, the size of economy is also expanded to almost four trillion rupees, we will be a five trillion rupee economy in the next few years, that's why we should invest in human resource to achieve our long-term goals.

What is your observation of the country's bureaucracy?

We can debate on the competency of the bureaucracy.

We might even say that our bureaucracy is not at par to perform and deliver efficiently.

These fingers are also pointed at political leadership. But had previous governments invested in bureaucracy envisioning the needs of 10-15 years ahead in time, would we need to point fingers at all? That's why we are going to invest in human resource and the results will be seen after 5-10 years. The incumbent Secretaries of the Nepal government came from an investment made 14-15 years back. If we don't invest in sectors like politics, technology, security or bureaucracy, we won't have control over the results in 10-15 years. We have to equip them with the skills and opportunities first. Despite that if they do not perform, then we must adopt 'carrot and stick' policy.

While taking an example of big-ticket projects, there is no problem of red tapeism but all we hear about is ill-practices and corruption from service delivery agencies. To stop the rampant bribery and malpractices, we came up with various digital interventions. We have rolled out the Vehicle and Consignment Tracking System (VCTS) that has

controlled the ill-practice of issuing fake VAT bills, similarly minimised the hassles of cross-checking at the road or entry points of major cities by the Revenue Investigation Offices. We can now track all the vehicles through an application.

Some of the national pride projects are in execution from years, we are monitoring them from the action room established in the Prime Minister's Office. Even during travel restrictions and lockdowns imposed last year, consultants of big-ticket projects monitored and provided instruction to contractors from that facility.

It is not mandatory to monitor physically by ministers or other authorities with long queues of vehicles at project sites, we can use available platforms by leveraging technology, encouraging workers and contractors, and enhancing the capacity of executing and implementing agencies.

The Prime Minister is considered tech-savvy and he has laid emphasis on digitalising government services to the best extent possible for effective and hassle-free service delivery. The government has also launched the Digital Nepal framework to digitalize services under eight verticals. However, there have not been many tangible changes?

That is not true. If you go to avail services at the land registration office you can see the transformation. It does not require you to go through the manual system. It is certain that when technology becomes disruptive to the old style of work, some jobs will become redundant but we have adjusted that unemployed human resource to other sectors. The land registration offices had bad reputation due to bribery. Customer should not have to

interact with the staff of the land registration office; they can now avail service through digital platforms. Along with digital mapping of land, we have also started digital soil testing facility. We are going to develop a similar digital system in transport offices too. People can renew their bill book, licenses and permits through digital platforms. Some of the local government offices have started online billing system and delivering services through digital platforms.

The government has also digitalised the monitoring mechanism of its policies and programs. We have developed indicators such as completed, in progress, stalled, etc. Each ministry reports everyday to the monitoring portal of the Prime Minister's Office.

'Hello Sarkar' platform has also been revamped. We've launched the Nagarik App, people are not required to carry documents to avail services like citizenship certificate or academic certificates among others.

What about the National ID card?

National ID card distribution is underway. I think we will be able to create 12 million National ID cards within a year. National ID card can be used as a barcode. However people are habituated to hold on to a physical card which is why the government has plans to distribute the cards within a year. The National ID card is also integrated with the passport. People, who are in foreign employment can avail passport (if their passport is expired) from their working destination, they can avail work permit from their working destination as well. They don't need to travel all the way to Nepal from their working destination to avail the aforesaid passport and work permit services. We have inducted our own software at the immigration, Nepal Port. It is developed by our own engineers and it is cost effective too. We were facing pressure

from foreign institutions to purchase their software but we trust our engineers. They have also developed a more secured system and we can track tourist entry into Nepal once a person is registered in the immigration system.

How do you rate the government response to Covid 19 which has been heavily criticised as weak and ineffective by the opposition and general public?

The government's response towards Covid 19 pandemic was timely and effective. The Prime Minister himself had talked with head of nations and heads of governments of Nepali migrant worker destinations to keep them safe and provide needful support. Nepali missions were mobilised to help migrant Nepalis. We all know that in a pandemic, it was not possible to bring around four million Nepali migrant workers from their working destinations. Leaders of the ruling party even tried to overshadow the government initiative through propaganda. However, the government has done its duty taking full responsibility of its citizens and also of foreigners stranded in Nepal.

If you see the death toll, it is low. In total of 279,388 infections, the death toll is 3,038. We have been trying our best to minimise loss of lives, that's why we have rolled out vaccination immediately after a month and half of its global launch. We have introduced insurance scheme to minimise risk. We are again threatened by a new variant of Covid 19 and we've started needful monitoring, taking measures of health safety protocols, and making people returning from India aware that they need to abide with health safety protocols.

The Prime Minister's advice to take hot water or milk with turmeric powder was mocked. Youth movement titled 'Enough Is Enough' were protesting with the demand of 100% PCR (polymerase chain reaction)

tests but later they understood that one time PCR test of all people is not a solution. Repeated tests can be required. When they understood, they settled and abided with health safety protocols. I would not like to condemn their movement; I don't know if it was spontaneous or they were provoked from somewhere. But they withdrew protests when they learnt the nitty-gritties of controlling the pandemic.

MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises) feel lack of support from the government. Likewise, daily wage labour have slammed the government for being apathetic towards their condition. Your comments.

The government has given emphasis on creating and retaining jobs through early recovery of pandemic hit MSMEs. The Nepal Rastra Bank has brought 200 billion rupee package and lowered the threshold of refinancing specifically targeted to MSMEs. Understanding the requirement of working capital by MSMEs and the hard hit tourism and hospitality sector, this scheme was introduced. Likewise, loan rescheduling and restructuring facility was given in the mid-term of fiscal 2020-21 and has been extended to the end of this fiscal. Concerned entities will intervene and facilitate if any MSME has grievances or they are unable to avail subsidised credit for their operation.

Preparatory work for fiscal budget 2021-22 is underway. The PM recently announced raising the social security allowance of senior citizens, widows, disabled and marginalized community. The expense in social security scheme is around Rs 91 billion in this fiscal. How does the government plan to manage resources to raise the allowance for almost two million people?

We have enrolled contributory social security scheme for working age population and that is the right way. The working age

population will receive pensions when they enter into their old-age. Active age population of current time will not need social security allowance. Similarly, health insurance scheme is being expanded to all districts and modern health facilities are also being developed by the government for providing needful treatment in their locality rather than making hospitals of urban areas crowded with huge inflow of patients. The state should protect the senior citizens and minor (children) population. We should not consider these expenses to be a liability. The social security allowance for the elderly was launched by the first Communist Prime Minister, erstwhile chair of the CPN UML late Manmohan Adhikari some 26 years back with monthly allowance of Rs 100 and Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli has raised it to Rs 3,000 per month or Rs 100 per day. Such protection will expand life expectancy and strengthen vulnerable groups economically so that every citizen can spend their old age gracefully. The liability on social security scheme will gradually come down once the contributory social security scheme is executed in a full fledged manner.

What is the theme of the flagship programs for the next fiscal budget?

The major focus of the government is to complete the projects that have remained incomplete since long if this government gets a chance to complete its tenure, and hold the general election completing five-years tenure for the first time in our history of multiparty democracy. If this government has to discontinue, we have laid the path for the successor government.

Our first priority will be completing long-run projects, secondly, we will invest in human resource that is required to execute and implement flagship projects initiated by our government. And, the

third priority is integrated development of agriculture, service and industry for economic development and job creation.

You have underlined the probability of discontinuation of this government before completing its five year term. Do you see the prospect of formation of new government because other political forces represented in the parliament have insufficient numbers of parliamentarians to claim majority in a bid to topple this government? Or, is there prospect to go for early elections under the leadership of PM Oli?

There are three prospects that can avoid early election. First is other political forces except CPN UML have to form the government. If not, some of the political forces have to support the CPN UML led government when Maoists withdraw their support. Third condition is if the other political forces except CPN UML do not form the government after Maoist support withdrawal or if any other political force is unwilling to support government for majority, it is certain that this government will announce general elections. I think CPN (Maoist Centre) will withdraw support from the government. We have heard that other political forces - Nepali Congress, Maoist Centre and Janata Samajbadi Party are discussing forming a coalition. However, it is still not clear that they will reach consensus or not.

Maoists Centre will be answerable to the people in the next election because they had contested general election of 2017 with a joint manifesto and yet they discontinued their support to this government mid-way.

Despite the obstruction created by them, we have been able to deliver a lot. If the government had not encountered this political crisis, a lot more would have been done.

Recently, we have

announced construction of 2,100 km strategic road network in 165 electoral constituencies at a total cost of Rs 57 billion. Prior to that, we have started implementation of road construction to link 210 municipalities and rural municipalities with highways. We are expediting the vision of a self-reliant economy partnering with the private sector, i.e., Make in Nepal.

Before Covid 19, we had inaugurated a vaccine production factory adopting cutting edge technology. Likewise, detailed project report (DPR) is being prepared for cross-border railway connectivity. We have already entered into the process to award bid for the East-West electric railway. To shorten the land route with our northern neighbour China, DPR of Betrabati-Syafrubesi tunnel road is being carried out. When the Tokha-Chhahare tunnel road will be completed, we can travel to Nuwakot capital, Bidur within half an hour from Kathmandu. Similarly, Kimathanka road (Koshi corridor) has achieved substantive progress, Kali Gandaki corridor is almost completed and Karnali corridor has also gathered pace. These corridors are strategic roads to connect our northern and southern neighbours. Why we need to expedite these corridors is because we must reap benefits from the rapid growth of India and China as they are the major players of the global economy. Nepal should not remain a consumer of the goods/services produced in India and China, that is why we are developing these infrastructures to enhance production and trade. We are on the road to supply 24/7 reliable electricity and we will have excess electricity after completion of 456 MW Upper Tamakoshi Hydel Project. We have also envisioned executing transmission highway along with cross border electricity trading infrastructure through grant aid from Millennium

Challenge Corporation (MCC). We will have excess energy from this wet season if we do not face hurdles to execute the cross-border trade infrastructure and transmission highway, and we would be able to sell our electricity to Bangladesh. Along with electricity export plan, we are also rolling out plans to reduce our reliance on fossil fuel (mainly LPG in the first phase) and encourage people to use electricity for cooking and other daily activities. To encourage them, we could trim tariffs on electric appliances. In the longer term, we will promote electric vehicle to promote use of clean and green energy which is critical from the perspective of environmental conservation through reducing green house gases.

Regarding MCC, the erstwhile ruling NCP leaders had opposed this, people had taken to the streets, the PM and those favouring MCC were called anti-national. What are your thoughts?

They were fearful of the accelerated development work because the Prime Minister is gaining popularity with the completion of projects and expanded access in government services with quality. There is no rationale behind opposing MCC's aid to Nepal for execution of two critical projects designed by Nepal based on its priority. I would like to cite the example of Melamchi, political parties are fighting to take credit for it. No matter whichever Prime Minister had envisioned this or who has completed it, finally it is the Nepali people who are benefited from this. We don't need to fight for credit. Today, we are in position to encourage people to use water as much as they can like electricity because we are able to deliver it. As per my understanding, agreement with MCC is more flexible compared to other development projects like Melamchi. MCC is going to provide us grant aid to execute transmission highway with

cross-border power trade infrastructure. Melamchi is constructed availing loan from multilateral development partners. Whatever conditions we have accepted to avail loan, there are no such conditions while availing the grant aid.

The agreements of MCC has already been made public with Nepali translation so that people can understand the reality. Even educated and academic people said that the US military will come to Nepal and camp along the transmission line's right of way; such baseless and provocative propaganda was designed and disseminated by anti-development forces or by those who don't want the country to progress. I am also amazed to see those people participating to make a mess of politics and development. People can easily access the MCC agreement and read it for themselves before making an opinion on the basis of hearsay.

Intraparty conflict is seen as a major barrier for governments, no matter they are Communist, Congress or others. Is it lack of maturity, self interest, or differences between the haves and have-nots while running a government?

It depends on the leadership. If all the ruling party leaders gave priority to the nation and people, it would be different. Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli is the main man for the alliance of the Communist party; the election was contested under his leadership. I don't mean that the other leaders have not played a role in the victory of the Communist party; they have played an equally important role but CPN UML Chair KP Sharma Oli was presented as the future Prime Minister. KP Sharma Oli played an instrumental role for the grand victory of the left-democratic alliance. When PM Oli took the helm, we immediately worked for the unification of party to avoid any instability. PM Oli took oath on February 15, 2018 but the

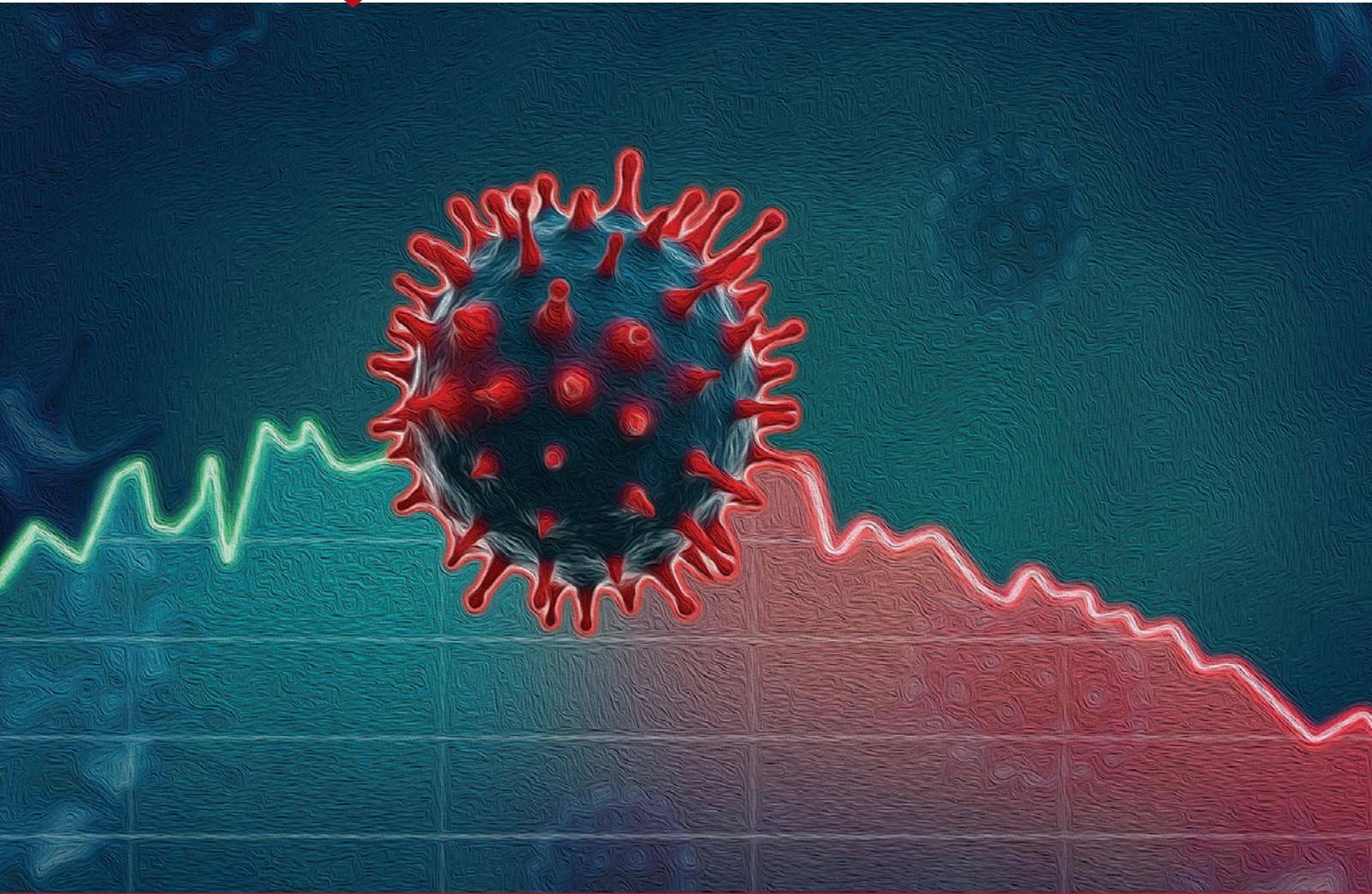
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coalition partner Maoists Centre had not sent any Minister to the Cabinet and only two Ministers from CPN UML were remaining till February 26. Minister for Home Affairs (Maoist Centre) and Finance Minister (CPN UML) were added to the Cabinet. It took over a month until March 16 to appoint all the ministers. In between that time, the Maoist Centre had looked into the option of forming government by making coalition with other political forces despite the fact that the Communist parties had contested the election under joint manifesto. Against this backdrop, both parties were unified in a rush on May 17, 2018. For stability, Prime Minister Oli had expressed commitment with the Maoist Centre Chairperson Pushpa Kamal Dahal to hold a general convention of the Unified Party from April 7-12, 2021 and that he will not contest for the Chairmanship of the Unified Party. PM Oli had also ensured Pushpa Kamal Dahal that he will be the face of the next election as the next Prime Minister, and that commitment was given in writing.

We have learned that the mandate given by the people for stability is not easy to retain due to such conflicts, and managing conflict is not easy due to impatience of ruling party leaders. And yet it is an established fact that stability is a critical factor for expediting development works, bringing in investment, delivering quality service and expanding access for the overall progress of the country. **B**





CRITICAL ECONOMIC RECOVERY & HEALTHCARE DELIVERY INTERVENTIONS IN FACE OF SECOND WAVE OF COVID 19

We are staring into a second wave of Covid 19 that - if allowed to go unchecked - could be potentially extremely damaging to the economy leaving in its wake not just threat to health and life but to sustainability of livelihoods across sectors. There has been no significant confidence in business movement despite the first phase of availability of vaccine. With the added burden of an unstable government, rise in corruption, low investment, tourism industry at almost complete stall, and lack of employment security across sectors, what would you deem to be three critical interventions that the government must assess, prioritise and implement to ensure that there is least damage to economic activity and recovery and better healthcare delivery?

Dr. Mona Shrestha Adhikari

CEO, EMERGE (Enterprise for Management, Economic Reform and Gender Equality)



The 'new normal' is here to stay. Businesses are struggling as everyone is grappling with their survival and livelihoods amidst managing Covid 19. Economic recovery is more crucial than ever as economic activities and people's well-being is very closely intertwined. Every individual, community and institution both at the private and public level must fulfill their respective responsibilities and join forces to use the crisis as an opportunity to build back better and build back equal. We were unable to do so in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake, but we should not waste the crisis this time around.

The government, in particular, has the resources as well as holds prime responsibility to revive the

economy more inclusively and sustainably. In my opinion, here are three critical interventions that our government could undertake:

Build a robust business thriving environment: Through sound policies, implementation arrangements and active monitoring, the government could make use of these institutional structures and help further build an environment that is grounded on trust and goodwill. Such an environment will help businesses to thrive even during times of crisis. It could leverage the involvement of local community groups and the private sector in generating employment and tapping into the reservoir of corporate social responsibly funds which are in most cases not

optimally used, such as those by the financial institutions. Digital literacy promotion and promoting innovative solutions aimed towards inclusive and sustainable growth must be the key focus of policies in all sectors. These measures can be supplemented by ensuring proper utilisation of refinancing facilities initiated by Nepal Rastra Bank. Support measures should be streamlined, hassle-free, easy, and quick for businesses to access.

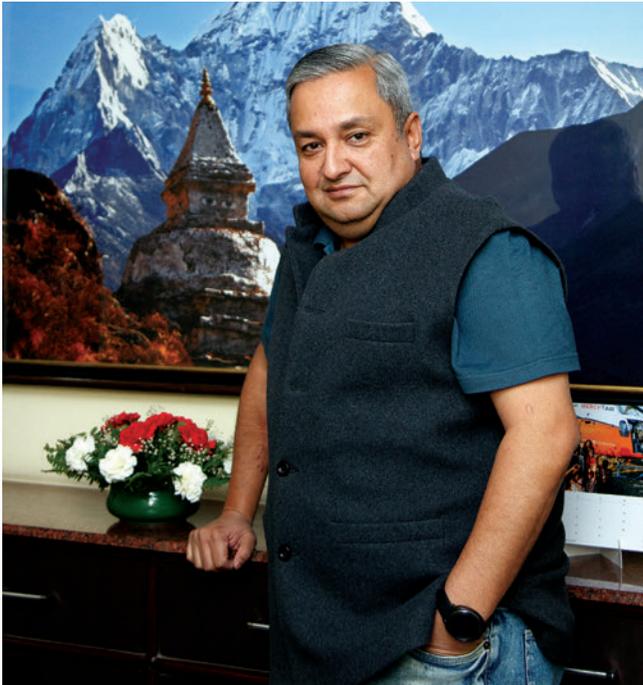
Foster and upscale inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystem: There is a growing demand particularly from diverse groups of youth, women and ethnic communities who are eager to join the entrepreneurship ecosystem. Harnessing their full potential would require the government

to foster and upscale inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystem for which more dialogues, platforms, and mechanisms must be created and strengthened for all interested to join hands and grow together. Training the right people in the right kind of jobs as deemed necessary depending on the need for the emerging skill sets. This is an area that the government could undertake through various training programs including vocational training that could meet the needs for both backward and forward linkages. One area that has relatively done better during the pandemic is e-commerce. However, most of this has happened due to the efforts of the private sector and compulsion for consumers to use their services, with limited support from the government. Three critical challenges identified by the eTrade Readiness Assessment conducted in 2017 are policies and regulatory framework, skills, and infrastructure. Government should therefore follow an ecosystem approach to the promotion of the e-commerce sector so that they are not only able to serve the domestic market, but also can enhance their export potential.

Increase government procurement: The government itself is a huge buyer of goods and services. We often run around in search of markets for our Nepali products and services when the government can take the lead and increase its procurement from Nepali producers or service providers. This would not only boost economic recovery but also encourage the local businesses to flourish, which in turn would generate employment.

Finally, what matters the most is the political will on the part of the government and responsible business culture – low on rhetoric and high on action. Doing so will help promote resilience as Covid 19 is not the last crisis we will ever face.

Rajendra B Singh
 Managing Director, Sita Air



It is normal for citizens to always expect better governance from their government. In times of natural disasters or massive health pandemics, governments become the one source for public safety and wellbeing. The earthquake of 2015 and Covid 19 pandemic have amply proven this. Unfortunately, government efforts acutely lack robust and proactive preparedness to deal with these massive onslaughts. The question that hits hard then in our minds is what is going to make it happen for our government authorities to put smart governance in place?

With the kind of international recognition and support Nepal enjoys in terms of cooperation and assistance, all we need is a proactive approach in Public Administration issues rather than conventional reactive endeavors. With the impact of the first wave of Covid 19 started to wane off – on the surface at least - it seems as though the government focus was concentrated only on the vaccination supply chain management.

In my opinion, everybody needs to understand that there

is not going to be a straight line “BACK TO NORMAL” scenario ever from this pandemic and in Nepal all of us are wishing for that to happen, even the governmental management approach seems to exhibit it. This pandemic definitely brings about paradigm shift in our day to day social as well as personal lives. What lifestyles or social management have we changed or adopted? This is the question that should prompt the government to create necessary interventions to try and keep Nepal safe from not only Covid 19 but from any future pandemics. We need to create long term defense mechanisms and design a regulated approach to balance and normalise our economic and social life. Vaccines alone may not be the answer.

I don't rate Nepal governments reaction to the pandemic as substandard though. Considering the national capabilities and resources, Nepal government did try to put its maximum effort in combating the pandemic as and when it started affecting us in 2020. However, functioning of the government in this matter is still riddled with unnecessary

bureaucratic autocracy, and by and large limited to drafting policies on paper rather than putting together effective implementation on ground. This needs to change and I know this is a way big thing to ask for!

Every minute that passes with nothing but the rhetorical sound bytes with regard to the impending real threat of the second wave and the official number counts has started to create panic. Authorities are still found to be happily confined to conventional wisdom that they had gathered before the onslaught of the first phase of Covid in our country. And least have they shown any proof of management intervention that they learnt in the handling of the first phase. Based on what all of us as a society have been through so far, following three things ought to be implemented to try and reduce the wild propagation of the virus second time around:

Protect Kathmandu:

This is the nerve center of the country not only in economic terms but in terms of national capabilities. If Kathmandu becomes the epicenter, it will eat up majority of the health care and governmental resources and then rest of the country will spin out of control. So implement toughest entry barriers into Kathmandu and start curtailing free movement within the valley as well. People's compliance to safety measures inside the valley like wearing masks are very encouraging, all that the government needs to do is to implement strictest barriers for the entry of virus inside the alley.

But on the contrary, at the time of writing this opinion, there has been unabated entry of people from India not only by ground but by air as Kathmandu suddenly becomes the re-routing hub for air travel to the Middle East due to the suspension of international aerial connectivity from India by several governments around the world. India is becoming the new epicenter and it should have been but normal

for us to have been diligent and maintain space. This is an acute indicator of how we function as a government and how far are we from creating our defenses. May be this is what our government needs to understand soonest.

Regulate Indo Nepal border points stringently:

One of the biggest mistakes authorities did last time around was to let Nepalese migrant workers flocking back from India go unchecked straight to their native places. This contributed solely to the spread of the virus to as remote places as Mugu and Humla needless to say about its spread in Kathmandu too. Authorities should not waste a minute to open only selected border points and establish maximum holding/quarantine facilities at selected border points. People coming in from India should be held for at least a week at these quarantines before allowing them to go to their respective home locations. Containment, identification and attack are probably the key things in countering the spread of this virus. In fact, local governments should increase quarantine zones at the entry point of each district in their respective areas and further screen people movement.

Increase the number of ventilators/lifesaving drugs needed for treatment and create maximum bed capacity across the nation in hospitals for Covid treatment. Recognise the doctors in private hospitals who were more than successful in treating Covid cases on their own and create a network of active, knowledgeable and proven medical heroes and collectively steer the management effort. Put expert medical faces to lead the process and not ordinary administrators or politicians.

If it is a real national emergency then first thing is to break away from the traditional governmental approach of management but as I have said may be this is a way big thing to ask for from our traditionally riddled government.

Prof Dr Harish Chandra Neupane

Chairman & Managing Director, Chitwan Medical College



Nepal's economy came to a standstill in FY20 with negligible growth of 0.2%. Covid 19 led to a deceleration in the service sector and a contraction in industrial activity in Nepal, further derailing the country's growth momentum. Growth is expected to remain subdued in FY 21-22. As periodic and localised lockdowns continue, under a baseline scenario, GDP is projected to expand by only 0.6% in FY21. Should Covid 19 persist, continued disruptions and weak subnational capacity to implement relief spending could weaken growth to 0.1% in FY21, thereby likely increasing poverty.

Addressing the numerous challenges posed by Covid 19 will require improving the quality of policymaking in the federal context. Short term response measures will need to be accompanied by comprehensive policies to boost long term growth. Policy transparency is central and fundamental at all stages of this Covid 19 response. This will include expanding and improving the results of investment in public health and education, and most importantly, improving governance and business

environments in the country.

Health & Education Sector Interventions:

Covid 19 pandemic started in May/June 2020 in Nepal requiring multispecialty hospital in different cities with sufficient critical care facilities (ICU beds, ventilators, high flow cannulas) and manpower to handle critical care situations. Once we have realised the failure in government health system to overcome these, we need to implement evidence based policies and effective planning, develop a clear mechanism for management of Covid 19 as well as a mechanism for proper coordination among the three tiers of the government and the health care delivery systems. Focus should be directed to systematic surveillance of risk factors associated with the rampant transmission of Covid 19 in the community. At the grassroot level, we need to develop strategies to empower communities to tackle Covid 19. The government needs to introduce supportive packages for vulnerable groups like differently-abled, elderly, children and immuno compromised individuals. We should also start leveraging digital health within the health system. It is paramount to

develop an effective system for contact tracing and maintain proper coordination between the case investigation and contact tracing (CICTTs) at the community level. The proper management of isolation and quarantine centres also needs adequate attention.

Pharmaceutical companies of the country need to be granted subsidiary loans so that the demand and supply of essential drugs and consumables for the management of Covid 19 can be adequately maintained without having to depend on other countries. We need to promote the use of our own raw materials for the manufacture of medicines, thus also creating jobs as well as working towards self-reliance and self-sustenance.

Higher Education institutions and schools should be encouraged to digitize content and to invest in technology to promote remote delivery of learning courses. Schools with technology and resources should expand their offering to students of less privileged schools as CSR activities. We also need to create a public awareness campaign targeting schools to address the spread of any new infections and enhance their preparedness. The government can conduct online entrepreneurial courses at minimal cost. Health related courses can be incentivised and trainer's time can be utilised for e-content development and e-training delivery. Educational institutions should be provided subsidised loan to maintain and expand their programs. Students pursuing their higher education should be provided education loan so that they can continue their studies as parents are deprived of regular income sources.

Food & Agriculture Sector Interventions:

In the days to come, various low interest financial arrangements should be made available for rapid recovery of loss from the Coronavirus pandemic. Industries related to food and agriculture should be granted a Tax Relief for

the period hit by pandemic. The Central and Provincial Government should classify daily essential foods items without having severe impact on supply chain to retail shop and industries. Should there be a national lockdown once again, Tax Relief should be provided to e-commerce businesses. There should be regularisation of transport for food delivery from farmers and producers to the local markets. It is mandatory to implement strict regulations in major vegetable markets and retail shops to prevent black marketing and unnecessary price hikes. Agriculture and allied export policy during pandemic needs to be commissioned and pesticides, fertilizers, etc. should be made available at concessional rates. Various seminars and trainings on agriculture and food related issues should be held and skill development trainings should be conducted. It is paramount to encourage youths to involve in agriculture sector as a prospective career.

Tourism Sector Interventions:

The government needs to adjust travel restriction continuously to address the level of threat of the Covid crisis. We need to ensure that the information on travel restrictions and other travel advisories are accessible, consistent and reliable. There should be reduction in corporate tax. Reduction should also be in individual tax rate to employees. Reduction in VAT for tourism related business should be implemented. Emphasis should be on promoting employment, upskilling and reskilling through digital intervention, as well as on identification of new tourism products and promoting tourism in cross cutting areas. Entrepreneurship should be encouraged and there should be provision of financial stimulus through prioritised lending, incentivised FDI and fast track investment in infrastructure. We should encourage completion of tourism infrastructure as well as promote digital intervention and transformation of tourism.

Ajit B Shah

Director & CEO, Lotus Holdings



In the beginning of 2020, the government imposed a nationwide lockdown from March to September due to the persistent drumbeat of positive tests and death tolls. Whilst the number of cases seem to decline steadily, the country suffered the most abrupt and widespread cessation of economic activities resulting in a plunge of 15.4% growth rate in Q4 of 2019-2020 fiscal year. Only after the government decided to ease restrictions and administer the Covid 19 vaccine, the country started to see a sign of a gradual economic recovery. With this impending Covid 19 second wave, drastic measures may not be an ideal solution and would only lead Nepal's economy back under stagnation. Instead, targeted interventions to curb the spread Covid 19 and stabilise the economy should be introduced.

To insulate the country from the second wave, the first and immediate response is for Nepal to apply containment measures on international travel. Following the guidelines of countries such as Australia, Thailand, and Singapore, those traveling into Nepal should be required a proof of Covid 19 test 48 hours prior to entering

the country. Upon arrival, travellers are subject to entry screening, at least seven-day mandatory state provided/ alternative quarantine, and RT-PCR testing twice during quarantine. Those who have been vaccinated may reduce the quarantine duration or allowed self quarantine but must report to public health officer. The Alternative Quarantine (AQ) scheme also has its benefits as it helps provide hotel owners with another revenue lifeline. In Thailand, for example, hotels signed up for AQ offer packages that are typically for single accommodation and include perks such as three daily meals, twice-daily temperature checks with a nurse on 24-hour standby, plus RT-PCR tests.

It is imperative that vaccine supply is sufficient for all and target population should be prioritised on the basis of occupations rather than age group. The upcoming second phase of inoculation should extend to include essential workers whose job functions are crucial to Nepal's economic continuity. Workers within food and agricultural, manufacturing, transportation and logistics, hospitality as well as service industries should be amongst

the first to gain access to the vaccine in order to minimise potential supply chain delays and service disruptions.

Toward resilient recovery, policymakers need to be forward looking in addressing the immediate economic challenges and reforming policies in driving local economy. Relief measures to swiftly alleviate and remedy those affected by the pandemic should be put in place at the initial phase of economic recovery. This could come in a form of liquidity support to ease financial burdens for businesses and households. In the medium term, the government must introduce credit measures such as debt repayment moratorium and reduction, debt restricting as well as soft loan scheme. Injecting stimulus packages that encourage local consumption through domestic travelling is another way to revitalise Nepal's tourism industry and local economy as a whole. The packages should be

designed to boost domestic travel by providing subsidies available for flight bookings, hotel accommodations, local activities, and food. However, the government must at least apply certain social distancing restrictions to guarantee safety.

Covid 19 also provides Nepal with an opportunity to improve its participation in the global value chain and reposition Nepal as the world's backbone. Generally, Nepal has a comparative advantage in tech services and will likely be in higher demand as the global economy is shifting digitally. This will play an essential role in creating new opportunities for informal workers allowing Nepalis to be integrated into the global supply chain. The government will need to improve digital access and equip workers with digital skill set and strengthen its infrastructure. Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) could be the first service industry to showcase Nepal's true potential.

Hari Bhakta Sharma

Executive Director, Deurali Janata Pharmaceutical



Improve vaccination rate by making vaccination available to larger sections of the society.

Enhance fiscal support program by allowing more industries to get access to the Covid 19 refinancing scheme announced in the monetary policy. Extend the validity of the refinancing to two years.

Improve the health management system (capacities in hospital both in terms of bed and equipments like ventilators) to cope with the situation specially if the outbreak exceeds the normal projections; as second wave is likely to be more virulent and infectious than first wave.



Covid Set to Strike Back

BUT WHERE ARE THE STRATEGIES TO FIGHT IT?



Basant Chaudhary is a Poet, Writer, Chairman of BLC and Basant Chaudhary Foundation. (feedback@basantchaudhary.com)

Never has the world come across an invader so savage and heartless as Covid 19. Its insatiable appetite for human lives is enervating. Many governments and dispensations have almost given up even before starting a fight against the world-wide viral pandemic.

Though Nepal has not suffered as grievously as many other countries -many of them highly advanced - the nation's government and officialdom has not exactly covered itself with glory in the anti-Covid campaign.

Repeated public agitations particularly by our youth against governmental inefficiency and apathy are reflective of country-wide public ire. Adding fuel to the fire is the ongoing political tussle for power in gross violation of constitutional, ethical and moral values. The masses are flabbergasted at the shameless way the political class and that too self-avowedly pro-people communists are trying every trick in the trade to retain or usurp power. Obviously, the ruling class has little time and inclination to do what it has been elected for – good governance.

As if this was not terrible enough, one finds that the second and, at places, a third wave of Covid is back to wreak havoc in many countries.

Tragedy is that at no place had Covid bid goodbye. The malaise had, at the most receded in parts of the world, before forcing a comeback largely because people chose to ignore basic anti-pandemic protocol of maintaining social distance, washing hands regularly, and wearing masks. Was that too much to ask for? But many were ignorant about these simple rules. Others were too arrogant to believe that they too could get infected. Covid caught them by the neck and used them as tools to spread its ruthless reign all across. No wonder, both the state and the

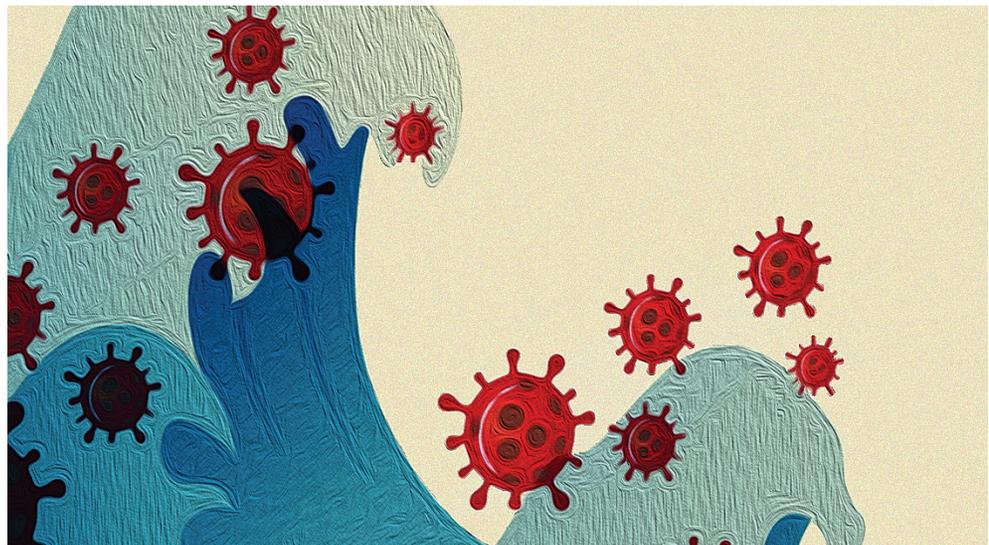
still not been traced. The World Health Organisation admitted this much after its investigating team returned from Wuhan, the epicentre of Covid in China, in March-end.

Also, there is no consensus among scientists about the efficacy, efficiency and longevity of vaccines prepared at, so to say, bullet speed by some countries and pharmaceutical giants. Usually, it takes more than a decade to develop and test a reliable vaccine. Moreover, it will take years to vaccinate all on the suffering planet which has been sadly divided into vaccine-

industry are showing no signs of concern for the coming times.

This neglect is most disconcerting in view of the fact that over 1.2 million Nepalis were pushed below the poverty line during Covid's one-year terror. As many as 1.5 million persons lost jobs; 9,24,000 job holders and 6,40,000 migrant workers.

What about our Covid-hit companies? While 89% of them have resumed operations, somehow only 16% have started making profits. Small and cottage units accounting for 10.89% are yet to stand on



people are to blame for, though in varying degrees.

One can, however, draw solace from the findings that the second wave is not so extensive, severe and fatal. This is because people in different affected countries have developed some immunity to Covid over the last one year.

But this is no guarantee that Covid's downhill journey has begun. In fact, this killer virus is the least understood micro-organism. Its origin has

haves and vaccine-have-nots. Unfortunately, Nepal is among the have-nots.

Neighbouring India is witnessing resurgence of Covid in at least seven of its states so far. Considering the porosity of our borders and open and unbridled migration to India by our job hunting youth, Nepal is equally vulnerable to repeated Covid infection.

Spurt in unemployment is staring us in the face. The elephant is in the room. Yet the state, its economic policy makers and captains of

their feet because of lack of access to any relief from the government.

The time has come for the government, squabbling ruling party factions, the opposition, economists, business czars and czarinas, and all right thinking people to put their heads together and devise a way out for Nepal in the uncertain Covid times. **B**



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FDI IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR

NEED OR GREED



Text: B360 Correspondent

The government's decision of welcoming foreign direct investment (FDI) into the agriculture sector reeled into controversy as protests emerged and the decision was challenged in court.

The government has decided to open up FDI in a few subsectors of agriculture

such as livestock, fisheries, beekeeping, fruit and vegetable production, oilseeds and lentil farming and dairy provided that 75% of the total production must be exported.

Contrary to the provisions of the Foreign Investment and Technology Transfer Act 2019 which restricts FDI in

primary production of the agriculture sector, the Cabinet meeting decided to open up these sectors to welcome foreign investment. Since the gazette notice was published on January 4, 2021, different associations of farmers are agitated and have asked that the government withdraw the

decision.

Farmers are distressed that with their old farming techniques and limited access to capital, the competition from FDI would kill their income as it would engage highly skilled labour, new techniques and advantages of scale. Instead, they have urged the government



to equip farmers with skills and technology that would make them more competitive.

Against this backdrop, the private sector umbrella bodies - Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), Nepal Chamber of Commerce (NCC) and Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI) - have jointly opposed the idea of welcoming FDI into primary agriculture products. They have stated that this decision was taken without any consultation with the private sector.

“The government does not even maintain a degree of courtesy of consulting the private sector. The government failed to understand the position of the private sector and this has raised doubts on the government’s intention,” said Keshav Acharya, an economist, “If there had been consultations, things might have been clearer.”

Most importantly, it is the duty of the government to consult with stakeholders before taking decisions that could directly or indirectly impact them which is the basis for a fair and transparent decision, stated Acharya.

The private sector joint statement argues, “We should allow foreign investment that

boosts export of the country utilising local raw materials for production through bringing cutting-edge technologies and skill sets at different levels of operation.”

The private sector umbrella bodies have underlined that the income from primary agriculture products is the lifeblood of farmers. However, the government has dismissed the claims of the private sector stating that FDI in the aforementioned sector is being opened up to minimise trade deficit and raise agricultural yield through modern technical know-how and skills.

Baikuntha Aryal, Secretary at the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies said that the production from FDI companies will be predominantly exported as there is condition of 75% export which automatically means that these companies will not exploit the domestic market. “This will neither distort the domestic market nor affect the farmers,” said Aryal, adding “Farmers can reap advantages selling their raw products to the companies set up by foreign investors, they will get skills and technologies for production once they are integrated in the value chain of such companies and fetch better price for their produce.”

Speaking at the Delegated Management and Government Assurance Committee of the National Assembly, Aryal said that the government has opened up foreign investment not in small and medium enterprises in aforesaid sectors. It requires at least Rs 500 million investment and mandatory export provision of 75%. He further clarified that it will not adversely affect farmers or SMEs. The government will take into account protection and security of domestic investment.

Earlier, the government had issued license to some dairies like Sujal Dairy of Pokhara and Chitwan Milk with protection provision in which the government will not provide license for another competitor in that certain catchment area to ensure that the dairies will not face scarcity of raw material. Dairy firms were at the forefront of the protest as they believe that the government is going to welcome Amul Dairy, India. Amul has repeatedly tried to enter Nepal, however the FDI law was a major barrier thus far, according to Saroj Pandey, owner of S.K. Dairy Industries of Nepalgunj, “The Nepali market is insignificant for a dairy giant like Amul, however if Amul enters the

Nepali market, it may gain in popularity and other domestic industries will be affected significantly.”

The government has alleged that Nepal’s private sector is scared to compete even on 25% of FDI production. However, the private sector stands firm in its stance. Dangote Cement is a case in point which could not enter the Nepali market due to anti-lobby by the private sector. Nepal’s private sector is often alleged with cartelling against foreign investment as they fear that modern technology and economies of scale could dampen their investment.

However, for the country, foreign investment in the production sector is a must as the growth of the production sector is stagnant, requires intensive investment, modern technologies and skill-sets to boost production, will create employment, exports and finally expand the economy.

The government’s decision of opening up FDI in agriculture was challenged at the Court within days of the notice being issued. The bench of Supreme Court Justice Manoj Sharma issued a short-term interim order to prevent the decision from coming into force. The Court has summoned the government to present before the court the rationale behind opening up FDI in agriculture following the first round of hearing on writ petition filed by Advocate Punya Prasad Khatiwada in the third week of January.

Total FDI flow in 2019-20 stands at Rs. 194.82 billion. Currently, annual average FDI flow is Rs. 15 billion. Nepal receives FDI that is less than 0.5% of the country’s GDP which is far below the average FDI flow in developing economies. The government has been repeatedly criticised for its inability to improve the investment climate to attract FDI into the country. Nepal’s FDI law promotes investments in trade sector, companies that generate employment and promote exports with a minimum investment threshold of Rs 50 million. **B**

INDIA SEEKS TO CRIMINALISE CRYPTOCURRENCIES

India has an estimated 8 million people invested in cryptocurrencies. A blanket ban would be a very poor decision.



NICHOLAS ANTHONY IS AN ECONOMIC RESEARCHER IN WASHINGTON DC WHERE HE SPECIALISES IN MONETARY AND FINANCIAL POLICY.

The Indian government is expected to propose a bill that would give cryptocurrency holders six months to liquidate their holdings. Failure to do so will result

in fines, and one government committee even called for jail terms up to 10 years.

It's well known that the Indian government has not been a fan of cryptocurrencies. However, a blanket ban would be the country's most severe policy, yet. As reported by Aftab Ahmed and Nupur Anand at Reuters, the bill is expected to criminalise the possession, issuance, mining, and trading of cryptocurrencies. And it is no exaggeration to say that this proposal could not have come at a worse time.

Voting with Their Wallets

Bitcoin recently reached a meteoric high of \$61,000. However, the real success story might be in what has been happening behind the scenes. Namely, Bitcoin has been catching the attention of both large-scale investors and the masses. It is no longer just in the hands of a few tech enthusiasts and maximalists. Companies like Tesla, MicroStrategy, and Square have taken long term positions and Wall Street has been turning to Bitcoin increasingly for speculative investing.

These companies have brought an "institutional credibility" to cryptocurrencies. For years, enthusiasts have been putting their money where their mouth is, but now that money is coming in the form of billion dollar investments. And people are taking notice. India alone has an estimated eight million people invested in cryptocurrencies.

In short, people are voting with



their wallets and they have shown that they believe cryptocurrencies hold a promising future. To pull the rug out from under them now would only punish Indian citizens for their entrepreneurial spirit. Moreover, undermining the network of investors and companies that have been built over the last decade will not be without cost.

Voting with Their Feet

The government's hostility has already motivated some citizens to leave for greener pastures.

Rahul Jain told the Economic Times that his company has moved to Estonia so that "any Indian law to criminalise crypto will not impact us." And others are doing the same. Sathvik Vishwanath said that if the bill is passed, "it will not make sense to continue our business in India."

It seems that the risk is too high to ignore, yet the opportunities yielded from cryptocurrencies are too high to abandon.

Luckily, private citizens have not been in this fight alone. It was only a year ago that India's Supreme Court struck down the Reserve Bank of India's attempt to forbid banks from dealing in cryptocurrencies. After weighing the arguments, the court ruled that the Reserve Bank's move was unconstitutional.

Incentives

Unfortunately, the Reserve Bank's incentives were no mystery: it has been planning to launch its own central bank digital currency since 2017. In fact, launching a

“A blanket ban in 2021 would be a poor decision. Currency competition should be welcomed, not penalised. The people have spoken, and they want to see the future of this technology.”

central bank digital currency is the other half of the proposed cryptocurrency ban.

It seems the Indian government believes that a blanket ban would be the easiest way to eliminate the competition.

In fact, a recent report from the Reserve Bank noted that central bank digital currencies are attractive because they can be designed to "promote non-anonymity at the individual level, monitor central bank 'helicopter money.'" Whereas cryptocurrencies have innovated to serve users, it seems this digital currency would be designed to serve the government. Without a ban on alternatives, it might be a hard sell.

Looking Forward

As the formal announcement of the proposal grows near, legislators would be wise to take note of the world around them. Cryptocurrencies have never been more popular, and they continue to break further into the mainstream with each day.

A blanket ban in 2021 would be a poor decision.

Currency competition should be welcomed, not penalised. The people have spoken, and they want to see the future of this technology.

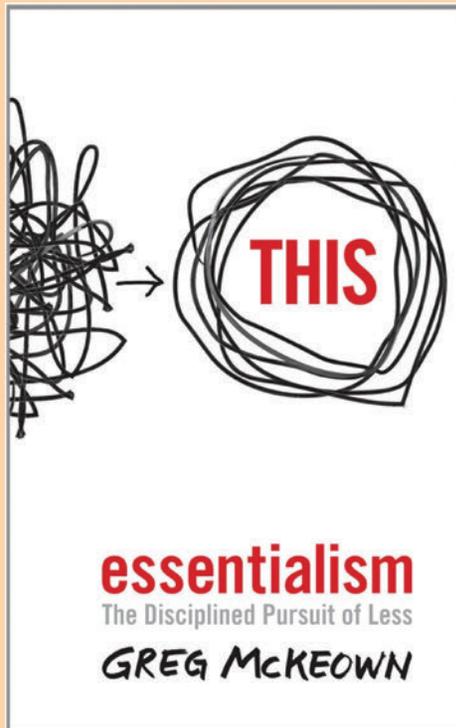
If the Indian government wants to launch a central bank digital currency, let it encourage adoption by making it the most attractive currency on the market; not by banning the competition and forcing its use. **B**

Source: fee.org

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less

Author: **Greg McKeown**



Essentialism isn't about getting more done in less time. It's about getting only the right things done.

Have you ever:

- found yourself stretched too thin?
- simultaneously felt overworked and underutilized?
- felt busy but not productive?
- felt like your time is constantly being hijacked by other people's agendas?

If you answered yes to any of these, the way out is the Way of the Essentialist.

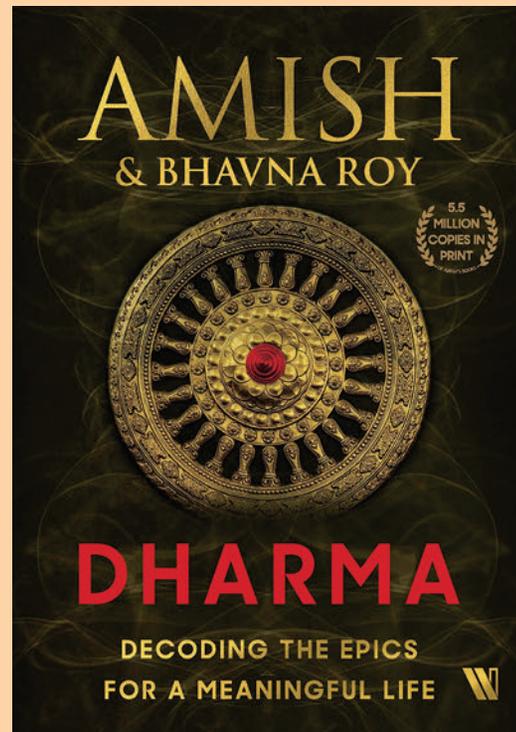
Essentialism is more than a time-management strategy or a productivity technique. It is a systematic discipline for discerning what is absolutely essential, then eliminating everything that is not, so we can make the highest possible contribution toward the things that really matter.

By forcing us to apply more selective criteria for what is Essential, the disciplined pursuit of less empowers us to reclaim control of our own choices about where to spend our precious time and energy—instead of giving others the implicit permission to choose for us.

Essentialism is not one more thing—it's a whole new way of doing everything. It's about doing less, but better, in every area of our lives. Essentialism is a movement whose time has come.

Dharma- Decoding The Epics For A Meaningful Life

Authors: **Amish Tripathi & Bhavna Roy**



Stories can be both entertaining and educative. They can also be insightful and illuminating, especially when they have travelled down the generations, through the centuries, taking on and eliding new meanings with each retelling. In this genre-bending book, the first of a series, Amish and Bhavna dive into the priceless treasure trove of the ancient Indian epics, as well as the vast and complex universe of Amish's Meluha (through his Shiva Trilogy and Ram Chandra Series), to explore some of the key concepts of Indian philosophy. What is the ideal interplay between thought and action, taking and giving, self-love and sacrifice? How can we tell right from wrong? What can we do to bring out the best in ourselves, and to live a life with purpose and meaning, not just one fuelled by the ego and material needs? The answers lie in these simple and wise interpretations of our favourite stories by a lovable cast of fictional characters who you'll enjoy getting to know.



LG Retreats from The Global Smartphone Market: A Farewell

Text: Sushil Neupane



On April 5, the Seoul-based giant LG Electronics Inc. announced that it was leaving the “incredibly competitive” smartphone market to divert its resources into electric vehicle components, connected devices, smart homes, robotics, artificial intelligence, and business-to-business solutions

LG’s mobile phone sector is expected to entirely shut down by the end of this quarter. However, the company has promised service and software support for its existing products “for a period of time which will vary by region.”

For those of us who lived through the era of feature phones, you probably had an LG phone in your pocket at some point. LG was a titan much like Nokia was in its day. And much like Nokia, LG’s smartphone wing will now be a case study for the businesses

of the future. We are not discussing that today.

Instead, today we bid farewell to yet another smartphone brand that was once our beloved. This is not a ‘rest in peace’ message, though; this is a thank you note for the company that brought us arguably the bulk of the features on our smartphones that we use every single day

In the twenty years that the mobile phone manufacturer has been in the market, it had made a name for itself as a company that was always willing to try new things regardless of its competitors.

Being a risk-taker meant that LG was the first to the ball in a lot of cases. For instance, LG was the first phone to introduce a capacitive touch screen with the LG Prada in a market run by pressure-sensitive touch screens. Sadly, the first iPhone that was released a month later is credited for the touch screen revolution.

LG was the first company to release a smartphone with slow-motion video recording in mid-2007 and high definition (1080p) video recording in 2011 with the LG Viewty and Optimus 2X, respectively.

It came out with the first curved smartphone screen in 2013, the first smartphone with an ultra-wide camera in 2016, the first ultra-wide smartphone screen all the way back in 2009, and the list goes

on. Not to mention, LG also manufactured the Nexus line of Android smartphones. And most importantly, they did not give up on the headphone jack and even managed to fit in a Quad DAC for the audiophiles out there.

In short, LG’s mobile division has been a keen factor in giving the smartphone market a direction, but that does not always translate to sales. Although LG came up with a lot of innovative features, competitors were simply better at execution.

As the YouTube tech vlogger Austin Evans aptly put, “LG were never perfect, but in a world of boring slabs, they delivered some of the most unique phone designs, ideas, and features ever.”

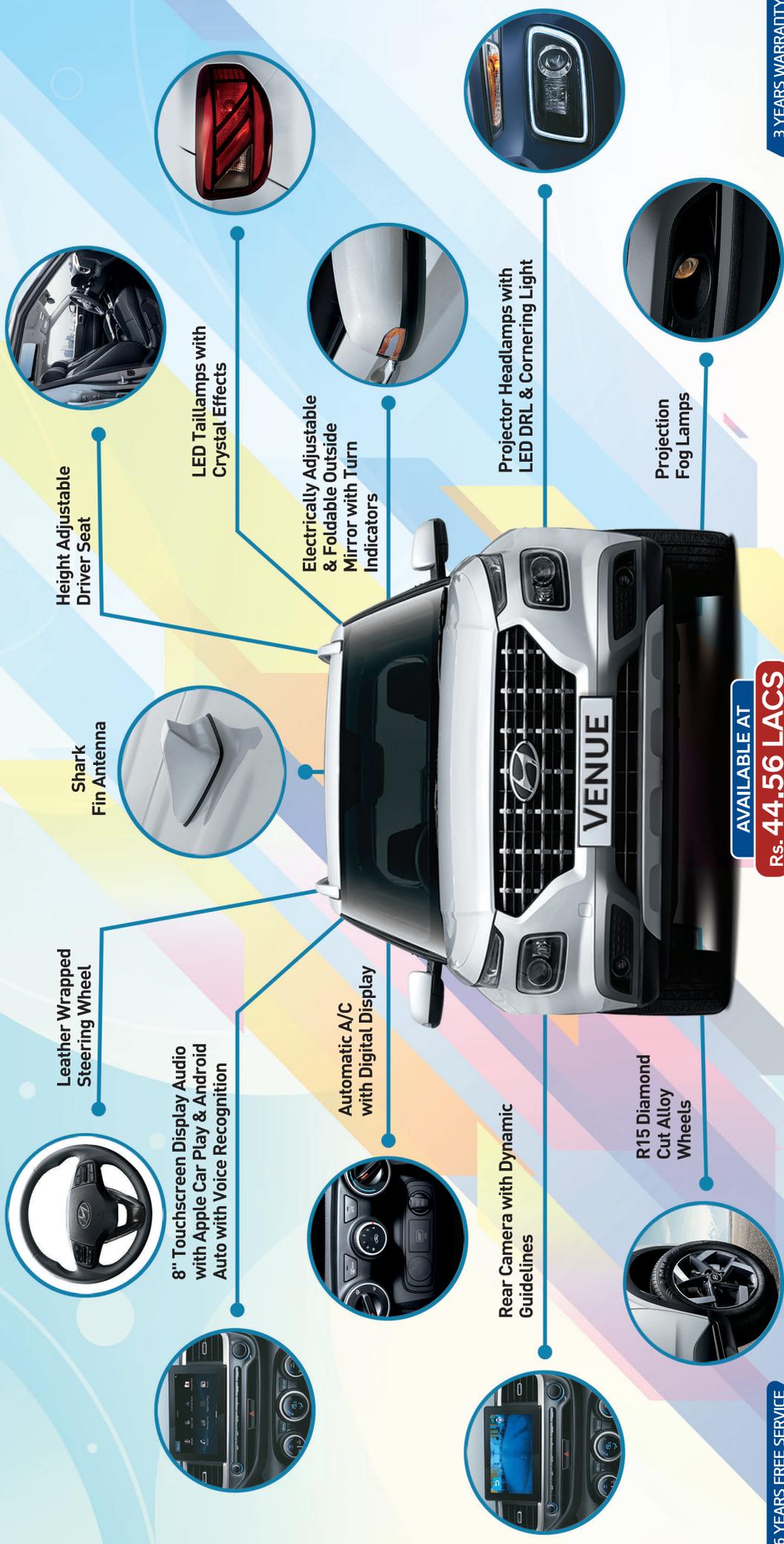
Following the press release from the tech giant, many flocked to social media with a massive outpouring of nostalgia and love, where users shared photos of their old LG phones and reminisced over the company’s willingness to innovate.

Well there is still a silver lining to all this. In the years to come, LG has promised to use its experience as the once dominant smartphone manufacturer to develop other mobile products and also 6G.

All that being said, this move from LG has left a 2% vacuum in the global smartphone market share which according to a CNN source, will likely be absorbed by Samsung and few other smaller players. **B**

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Ranjit Raj Acharya

CEO, Prisma Advertising & Chairperson,
Startup & Innovation Committee of FNCCI

44 The government is very excited about FNCCI having this committee so they are supporting us; they are collaborating with us for getting the policy in place; bringing it onboard and getting some policies corrected like FDI for startups right now begins at Rs 5 crores plus. We are trying to bring it down to Rs 50 lakhs. That way many startups can get seed fund from outside.

Apart from the recently acquired responsibility at Startup & Innovation Committee under FNCCI, Ranjit Acharya is the CEO at Prisma Advertising, Director of Media Hub, Chairperson of Bridgewater Education & Research Foundation, and MD of Neel Barahi Films.

This is Acharya's third term as an Executive Committee Member at FNCCI. Because of his own experiences of mentoring and managing the startup ecosystem, and having worked intensely with some of the accelerator programs as a mentor, he says the repertoire of knowledge provided the impetus to take on the responsibility of steering Startup & Innovation Committee as the Chair. The committee has two co-chairs, Siddhant Raj Pandey and Suman Shakyia. Prakash Dev Palikhe, Niraj Khanal, Dipendra Chaulagai, Mausami Shrestha, Sumana Shrestha, and Swarna Tamrakar are its members. The invited members of the committee are Tenzing Sonar Gomsar and Kavi Raj Joshi. Further former executive committee members of the FNCCI Om Rajbhandari, Saurabh Jyoti and Anil Chitrakar act as advisors of the committee. Many of these

individuals are already attached to doing something similar to what FNCCI has envisioned. Acharya remarks, "We are bringing their expertise onboard and since this is a Federation, they were more than happy to come and work with us. They are sharing their knowledge, expertise, documents - everything that is needed. That's how we are moving forward."

Ujeena Rana had a talk with Ranjit Raj Acharya regarding the Startup & Innovation Committee and the reasons why entrepreneurship in Nepal should be promoted.

Why did FNCCI decide to form the Startup & Innovation Committee now, almost 55 years after its establishment?

When the new leadership team under the leadership of our President Shekhar Golchha came in, we decided to plan not just for one or two years but to have a 10-year vision. In that 2030 Vision Plan, there are a few basic objectives which we are talking about: Double digit economic growth; taking our economy from 34 billion dollars to 100 billion dollars; and creating 400,000 employment every year

If we are looking at these figures and if we are looking

at the plan of action that we have and the objective driven programs, then we are also hoping that by the end of 2030, the trade deficit that exists will come down by at least 50%.

When we look at 400,000 employment generation, then we cannot leave aside small and medium enterprises and when we look at SMEs, we cannot then discard the startup ecosystem. That's the link between the entire program.

When we were developing the vision paper, when the above mentioned objectives came as our main objectives for 2030, we thought about ways to achieve it and wondered if it is 400,000 employment creation every year, then is it just the industries, is it just the service sector, is it just small enterprises or is it also startups through which we plan to accomplish our target. The way the world is growing, the way startups have been emerging and making impact on entire economies, the way the startup ecosystem in Nepal started evolving and growing; the way the new breed of entrepreneurs started coming up and blossoming in the startup ecosystem, startups will be basically one of the forces to create employment. That's where we realised that now is the time to focus on startups.

FNCCI, which is the federation of different industries and chambers of commerce, felt that there is a missing link between FNCCI and youth entrepreneurs. Youth entrepreneurs have not looked at FNCCI as their federation or umbrella body. So that gap was always there. The federation wants to encourage new ideas, new entrepreneurs and startups to move ahead and encourage them to get into entrepreneurship so that there is opportunity to create employment through them which will substantiate our objective of 400,000 employment.

So how does the committee achieve this?

This committee was designed to create a strong linkage with budding entrepreneurs to help achieve

the goal of 400,000 employment per year as per the Vision 2030 of FNCCI; and to support the startup movement in Nepal by collaborating with the government and regulating bodies for creating governing documents and policies to help the growth of this committee. These are the objectives we have to help build a robust ecosystem for entrepreneurs.

We are also working with the government at this point to develop startup policies and to develop SOP for incubation centers. All the policy driven things being done through the government right now is through our committee. Last week we had a meeting with the Finance Minister, Finance Secretary and the team. We also had a meeting with the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies.

We will be bridging the gap between large businesses and new businesses. We wish to cater to the missing middle - there are starting startups, those who have ideas and then there are startups, those who have converted into entrepreneurs and have done well. But in between there is a missing middle; they are not catered to by anyone. So we are trying to cater them.

We plan to create new employment opportunities through new entrepreneurs. It is not a fund-management program. This is not a seed capital. We are basically bringing onboard investment and this is open to all category startups.

Is this where the Investor Forum comes into play?

We are doing different programs from this committee; one of the landmark programs that we are looking at is 50/50 which is Fifty Businesses and Fifty Investors.

From our experience, what we and the committee members involved with us realised is that in Nepal the startups come up with great ideas. The idea sprouts and becomes a small plant and they put in all the effort, whatever money they have, they put in to create it as a plant. So when it has to grow and it needs fertilizer, that's when things kind of shake up



because they don't get funding to buy the fertilizer.

Accordingly, these startups do well initially but because they cannot scale it up as they don't have the support, that's where they fail. Through 50/50 we are not talking about generating ideas, we are talking about those who already have ideas and who have already rolled in their business; we will be supporting those startups who have not been able to scale business through investment. We plan to meet our objectives in two ways:

Large industries, large groups, large business houses have not looked at startups as an investment opportunity until now. We want to show them that there's an opportunity with startups where you can invest and make them grow as well as there is business opportunity for you. We want to showcase that to our business entrepreneurs

those who are affiliated with FNCCI.

We also want to showcase that there are enough investors in Nepal. If there is a good idea in business, then they are ready to support and invest. Every startup entrepreneur is thinking that s/he will be getting funds from outside through angel investor and venture capitalists. All those fancy terms are there. So they feel that that's the only place they need to focus on. So we wanted to showcase to them that there are investors in Nepal if you do well; there are investors in Nepal interested to work with you.

Walk us through the process of the 50/50 program functions.

We will be launching our forms by the second week of April in public and any startup can participate and apply. There is no restriction to the kind of

business. Any field of business can apply whether they are in service sector, agro or tourism. Startups involved in any field can apply. When I say any startup, I mean any startup which has been running for a year or more, has a one-year balance sheet, and is in, up and about situation can apply for this program.

The form will have other questionnaires which a startup needs to fill in their profile, partners profile, objectives, what have they achieved till now, what kind of growth opportunity they see with their business, all those things they have to fill in to apply.

Thereafter, our team will screen the applications. Whoever will pass through that stage, our team may ask for certain supporting documents from them. If they pass through this, then the third stage is the

interview session where the committee will take interviews of the selected entrepreneurs to make the final selection.

Once the startups get selected, then the selected list will be provided with mentors from our side. We have a rich mentor pool; 20 eminent experienced mentors from the business sector. The selected startups will then undergo the Mentorship Program wherein they will be assigned with a mentor for three months and those mentors will individually mentor the business to repair their issues - wherever they are making mistakes, guide them to correct it; wherever they don't know how to monetise, show them the approach and help them transform. The mentorship program is '20 businesses with 20 mentors' for three months of mentoring.

Once that is done, we will



train them on presentation skills for a couple of days. They will then be pitch ready to present their ideas to investors. We will invite them to FNCCI where the investors will be waiting for them to pitch their ideas. Once that happens, investors will be given the forms to select the business they are interested in and we will then facilitate them to have meetings with these startups. After that they will negotiate on their own and take the deal forward. That's the program we are looking at when we are talking about 50/50.

In a nutshell, screening of the first list will be done by the second week of May 2021; interviews of the selected list will be completed by the last week of May 2021. The final list will be published by the second week of June 2021. Mentorship program will start from July, and will run through August and

September. The first pitch will take place in the first week of October.

The form will be made public from the second week of April. There is no deadline for the form submission. People can keep applying and we will keep screening and the process will keep rotating because it is not a three-month program as such. This will continue for two years. I am there as the executive committee member for two years. I have to get re-elected and come back, until then I can make a plan for my term only. FNCCI will continue with this committee and some other members will lead it who will introduce other new programs.

Who are you collaborating with for the fruition of the programs?

We have been collaborating with the government for policy and regulation. Right now, the government does not even have a proper definition of startups. So we are helping them develop the definition. Committee is also involved in creating conducive environment for startups by having dialogues with stakeholders, banks and development agencies.

If I am heading the Startup & Innovation Committee, if there is no proper policy which is startup friendly, then whatever I do is going to fail. Startups were not in our focus. FNCCI was focusing on SMEs, MSMEs and then industries and it was only advocating for policies friendly to all these employments. That is there but startups was not the focus of FNCCI till now. Now, it has become the focus.

We are also planning to create database of startups by creating an e-directory which will have the details of the startups and their business descriptions. For this we are partnering with Anterprerana.

Other than that, we are looking at some partnership with UKaid Skills for Employment Programme (स्कीप). They are trying to get us expertise from the financial sector. They will be involved in these businesses as financial consultant to help them fine tune their financial approach and practices.

So 50/50 is what the committee is basically focused on?

Besides 50/50, we have another program; it's a knowledge series called 'First Friday Talk' in which we invite successful entrepreneurs from different fields of expertise. In essence, First Friday Talk is an objective driven talk program. We did our first one with Gagan Pradhan and his team on 'Franchising as a Business Model'. The participants were all invitees after they applied and they are all involved in franchising business or they were looking forward to franchising business. The almost three hour long interactive program was based on the success story of franchising business of Himalayan Java and how to do business as a franchise business, the mistakes you can make, the corrections you need to make, the opportunities; everything around the subject was discussed followed by a Q&A session. We conduct this series on the first Friday of every English month between 3 and 5:30 pm. Since the entire program is a knowledge series, it is objective driven. Attendance is by invitation only. Prequalification is required for this.

Moreover, we have incubation centers which is a support program. We are operating iHub at FNCCI right now as FNCCI Innovation Center which will be converted into incubation centre from May. Co-working space for four startups will be provided at FNCCI. If there are startups with great ideas and have recently started but are without a working space, we will select some of them to provide free co-working space. It is more to help district level startups which cannot come to Kathmandu otherwise and those who cannot have a working space in Kathmandu. We will be helping them through this.

We are also looking at district level incubation centers which will be planned with few of the district chambers who are our partners. Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Kathmandu Metropolitan, Kathmandu University,

Anterprerana will be partners for incubation centers. Then the district chambers will be partners for district incubation centers.

What are the identifiable challenges you have anticipated for 50/50 program?

The possible challenges that we might have is not finding the right businesses. Though there is excitement in the market, it could be possible that while we are doing this, there may be companies which may not be following due diligence of financial protocols. And they may not get selected and we may not have enough number of businesses to take this program forward.

Other challenge is that they could be good businesses but their deal may not materialise because of the negotiation with the investors.

Additionally, every startup will have to understand that when the mentor is ready to mentor them and if they are not ready to take the suggestions and take their mentorship then I don't think that the startup has a great vision. In our times, we did not have that opportunity; today there is. Today, experienced people who have failed many times are going to share their knowledge, experience about how not to fail, and if a startup is not ready to provide that kind of time and get committed to those suggestions, I don't think they have a long road to travel.

Provided these challenges will not come, we will be successful in getting the program rolling. The government is very excited about FNCCI having this committee so they are supporting us; they are collaborating with us for getting the policy in place; bringing it onboard and getting some policies corrected like right now FDI for startups starts from Rs five crores plus. We are trying to bring it down to Rs fifty lakhs. That way many startups can get seed fund from outside. All these things are happening. I am excited about it. **B**

“

Samsung stands as global #1 in terms of smartphone sales and we have been the most preferred and the highest selling brand in Nepal for many years now. As per our internal data, our market share stands at 55% in Nepal.

Director of Mobile Business at Samsung Nepal, Pranaya Ratna Sthapit began his professional career with Nepal Level Limited (now Unilever Nepal) right after completing his MBA in Marketing from Kathmandu University in 2001. He considers himself fortunate to have received trainings in various sales and marketing components in the regional headquarters in Mumbai and Delhi. “I truly feel that it built the foundation for developing my core competences in the field of sales and marketing in the early days of my career,” he shares.

Sthapit then had a short stint with Chaudhary Group in its food and beverage division before joining Bottlers Nepal Limited in 2004 where he got the opportunity to head the

Pranaya Ratna Sthapit

Director – Mobile Business, Samsung Nepal

marketing department and sales department at different points in time. Though his key area of interest has always been marketing, he also developed interest in sales. Sthapit says, "In fact, sales and marketing have to go hand-in-hand to achieve desired results for any organisation. Many people perceive Coca-Cola as a genius in marketing, but since more than 70% of the consumption is impulse driven, it's equally crucial to have on-ground execution at the point-of-sales." After spending almost a decade at Bottlers Nepal, he joined Samsung Nepal as the Head of Mobile Business in 2014.

It was a big change for Sthapit moving from FMCG to electronics, a different working culture where the speed of industry undergoes constant changes and innovation. "It's very dynamic." Now when he reflects back on his career, he says that these very changes have helped him polish his skills and enabled opportunities of such diverse experiences and growth.

In an interview with **Dibesh Dangol**, Pranaya Ratna Sthapit shares his perspective of the Nepali market, the sales and marketing insights of Samsung Mobile for Nepal and the future of media marketing. Excerpts:

What technological innovations are on the horizon and what can we expect from Samsung Nepal in 2021?

Samsung is one of the leading tech companies in the world and is amongst the top five most innovative companies as per research carried out by Boston Consulting Group. It's because of the company's continuous investment in research and development of products that people are appreciating Samsung both at the local and global level.

Globally, Samsung devices are loved by consumers and lately the S21 series received an overwhelming response due to its cutting edge technology like Exynos 2100 which is a very powerful and power efficient chipset, a 108-megapixel

camera which is capable of giving stunning pictures and dynamic AMOLED 2X 120Hz display which provides most vivid viewing experience.

On the other side, foldable display is the next big thing in the mobile industry. Few months ago, we saw Samsung Z Fold2 being launched globally and the device received huge attention from gadget lovers all around the globe. In 2021, we are also looking to even more exciting variants of foldable technology which is more powerful and at the same time more practical than its predecessor.

Locally in Nepal, Samsung has been the most loved and preferred mobile brand for many years. Our endeavour is to cater to all the segments of the market as consumer needs vary. While we introduced S21 in the beginning of 2021 with cutting edge technology, we are also trying to cater to the need of entry and mid segment consumers which constitutes the bulk of the market.

Considering the local needs, we launched M series that offers bigger battery and high resolution cameras. M51, M12 and M02 are models we launched in 2021 in the M series. We also launched the A series: A52 and A72, recently in Nepal. The A series is more of a global line-up which is mostly aligned on the power, performance and design side whereas M series is known for its sheer performance and battery. We try to have that fine balance between the local need with the M series but at the same time offering the global flavour with the launch of the A series. In the mid and the mass segments, we have a very fine balance between these two product series so that we can address every type of consumer need here in the local market.

We expect even more promising line-ups in the second-half of 2021 in Nepal and I am particularly excited about the new foldable technology. Foldable devices are very niche products because it's a new technology

and a lot of research and development has gone into it. Definitely, we are looking forward to expanding it to the larger population by addressing the affordability factor which is why firstly, we want to launch the product at the affordable price point and secondly, we want to offer affordability programmes like EMI because everyone may or may not be able to spend couple of lakhs upfront and EMI is the most accessible and quick affordability programme. We are working towards partnering with banks and other financial institutions for this programme because it is very crucial for us to have financing partners who share similar modality.

What are the sales and marketing strategies of Samsung for Nepal?

At Samsung, our endeavour is to cater to every customer segment, and moreover customer preferences are ever-evolving especially when it comes to technology. Hence, our effort has always been to understand and fulfil consumer needs according to the changing trends. In order to achieve this objective, we are working on four things:

Firstly, it's very important to have right products at right prices. Few years back, Nepalis used to travel abroad to buy electronic goods. Now things have changed because products are being offered at right prices with all the warranties and assurances so that people can buy the products locally and not import from foreign countries.

Second is product awareness and drive to own factor. People are aware about Samsung as an electronic brand but might not be aware about the product variants. So our strategies, including marketing and sales, have always been to make people aware about our products whether it's an entry level phone, mid range phone or high end phone. Similarly, people owning Samsung phones should feel proud about the product and the brand they are carrying because Samsung products are global products

with so much innovation and R&D behind them. It's our main objective with our marketing strategies.

Third is the best consumer experience at the point-of-sales. I have learned from my stint at Bottlers Nepal that point-of-sales experience is very important. For Coke, it was about having the ice cold Coke within arm's reaches. But when it comes to devices, it's about delivering the right information and customers having appropriate experience at the point-of-sales. The information about the product has to be properly communicated to the consumer at the point-of-sales. Unless and until that happens, consumers will not be convinced to buy the product. So, we have to provide accurate information and appropriate information at the point-of-sales which we have been doing through our promoters, leaflets, displays, etc.

The fourth one is to be accessible and offer reliable after-sales services. It's very important because that's where the consumer trust comes from. It's easy to sell a phone, but it's difficult and important to keep the consumers happy after selling a phone. The after-sales experience will decide whether we can retain that customer or not. If you cannot make customers happy after selling a product, then s/he may not choose the brand next time which is why we are continuously working on providing more accessible after-sales service throughout the country.

Another area is upgrading our current customers. We found out that customers always want better device when it comes to switching from an old to a new device. The only one hindrance they face is about the affordability. Of course, everybody wants to upgrade one or two notches. Then again everybody might not have the cash-in-hand to go for it. Hence, we are working with our channel partners such as national and regional distributors, retail partners along with the financial



institutions like banks and finance companies to make our devices available at EMI with zero percent interest charges.

Side-by-side, we are also working on the exchange platforms because many people might not know what to do with their old device while purchasing or wanting a new one. So, we are coming up with

various programmes associated with such customer dilemmas. We did a very successful exchange campaign with the S21. These are a few things which will help in terms of the affordability.

How are Samsung products handpicked for the South Asian and Nepali market?

As the demand is high for entry level and mid-segment phones, i.e. below Rs 35,000 in Nepal, majority of products are also handpicked accordingly. Hence, firstly we make sure that our product offering is cleared at every price point such as below Rs 10,000, Rs 10,000-15,000, Rs 15,000-20,000, and so on.

The millennial and Gen Z consumers of Nepal are power hungry and look for phones which offer high power, battery and processor. These are the consumers who sit at the mid-segment products. Realising this we introduced the M series which is actually meant for people who look for power-packed high spec devices at a very attractive price point.

On the other hand, there are consumers who want the cutting edge technology and flagship devices; for them we have S series and now even the Z Fold 2.

The main idea is to address the needs of the consumers in every market segment and mix the products at all the price points. So, from a basic bar phone to cutting edge technology phone like Z Fold 2, Samsung has product offerings for everyone though the bulk sits with the entry and the mass segment.

How do you assess Nepal's trajectory and what does the Nepali market mean for Samsung?

Our consumer research shows that Nepal has one of the highest brand awareness and preference for Samsung as a brand in the entire region of South West Asia. We aspire and are continuously working to stay at the top of the consumer mind at all times. We are really proud of this achievement and it matters a lot to Samsung even though the market size of Nepal is small.

Samsung stands as global #1 in terms of smartphone sales and we have been the most preferred and the highest selling brand in Nepal for many years now. As per our internal data, our market share stands at 55% in Nepal.

How has Covid impacted the electronics and smartphone industry?

The overall economy was impacted by Covid and the smartphone industry was no exception. The industry did suffer but the only difference was that the industry was able to bounce back quickly; the reason being increasing need of smartphones and connectivity.

During the first three months of the lockdown, there was shortage of products because no one was able to import due to the travel restrictions. But immediately after the market opened up, the demand really grew and we could bounce back strongly immediately after the first lockdown. That has been the case with the industry.

During lockdown, our sales figures were negligible because people couldn't move around. After the lockdown, the industry grew by almost 20-30%. As for 2021, the business has returned to the normal state but the future is still uncertain due to the increase of Covid cases globally and lockdowns in some of the cities around the world.

What's your view on traditional media marketing versus the new age media marketing? Where do you think it is heading?

Majority of industries are moving towards digital marketing but traditional marketing still has its own importance. I think traditional media like television and print publications cannot be fully replaced by the digital platforms. Many people still value its significance and trust the traditional media.

Still the importance of digital marketing will grow exponentially in the days to come which is why many traditional media platforms are adopting a hybrid structure where they have focused on creating and sharing their contents on its digital platforms as well. **B**



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“One has to be persistent and smart to see what is actually going on. Business is not a place for being delusional.”



Rachael Manley
Director, Imago Dei Café Gallery

Rachael Manley started Imago Dei Cafe Gallery 15 years ago when she was just 22 years old. It was her first business venture and she wanted to do something different from what was available in the market. She chose Naxal as the venue for her business, away from Thamel and Durbar Marg which were the hot spots for restaurants.

Although Manley is a business student, she shares that the practicalities and realities of starting a venture are quite arduous. It took a lot of research, changing things around, strategising and networking, and time to find her footing but she took it upon herself to create a business that reflected her creativity and passion for good food. "Little by little the business grew and honestly it's been a really interesting journey," highlights Manley.

Her menu is consistent with quality and taste and her cheesecakes are the most sought after in town. She ensures choosing the right ingredients, honouring the recipe and not taking shortcuts. "Great recipes have been made for a reason."

Excerpts of an interview with **Dibesh Dangol of B360:**

How did you decide to combine food and art when establishing Imago Dei?

It's very challenging for people to visit places of art. Going to a museum is relatively harder than having a museum in a place where you are comfortable at. So the idea behind Imago Dei was that if you had a restaurant surrounded by art, it would open up art to the people.

The art scene is very interesting in Nepal. I've grown to be fond of the Nepali art and artists. I see how the senior artists have developed and the younger artists are coming through. I can see the inspiration both globally and locally and I really appreciate the connection artists have to the local culture.

Valuing anything artistic is still challenging; it's just



not about paintings but also fashion and graphic design. It's hard to put a monetary value on someone's creativity and it's still a challenge and very subjective. People like Sangeeta Thapa have made a huge imprint in understanding and having the ability to value arts. There are a few people that have amazing collection and are very intense about collecting art. For the most part, there are fewer buyers. I personally buy pieces that I am connected to and I love.

What is the unique selling point of Imago Dei and what did it take to make an impact in the food business in Nepal?

Other than the cheesecake, it became a place for people to meet. Food is consistent and reasonable; it has a very friendly and cosy environment.

The mindset of getting up each day and keeping Imago Dei going is what kept me going. Not many people ate out 15 years ago, but there were wonderful restaurants. It takes a lot of determination and I don't think a lot of people get it right in the first try. One has to be persistent and smart to see what is actually going on. Business is not a place for being delusional.

What are the pros and cons of being a restaurateur?

It's a wonderful business. It is fun to develop products, engage with customers and create a place for people to enjoy. The cons are that the hustle never ends. There are always small problems everywhere. It's always a challenge to tackle these in an effective way.

What are the challenges of the food business in Nepal?

One of the key challenges is creating a team that works well together. Individually people can be great, but in the food industry we all have to work together and we have to create systems from service to dishwashing. For that we need a team that is solid and have each other's back and a team that would kill for each other... to create this scenario is often challenging.

What's the competition like?

These days the competition is tough and it's not just because of the number of restaurants but also the standards of restaurants. It improves year by year which I love and is really nice to see but at the end, it is competition.

How do you perceive the work ethics in Nepal?

I saw a lot of Nepalis working in the F&B industry in Hong Kong from sous-chefs to some of the top names in the industry. Some of the Nepalis have started their own bars as well. Like anywhere in the world, people who choose to work hard, thrive when given the right opportunity and area of interest. My team is really keen to work hard, do things differently and learn.

How do you view the laws of Nepal for foreign investors in SMEs?

It's challenging. I think, for right or wrong, the interest of the government seems to be on larger scale industry, which is understandable. If I look at investment laws in other countries, there are limitations based on meeting certain amount of money, hiring certain number of people and having certain number of local employees. All of these rules are there in every single country. I would love the opportunity to continue to grow and to do different things, and I would absolutely appreciate the government's support with that. There is a lot that I can contribute but for that you need a level of security with my investment and the ability to grow.

What is your success mantra?

There are lots of things in my life where I have not been particularly creative when I first worked at them. I am not naturally talented at things, however I also know that when something works for me it works for me, which motivates me to keep on learning, growing, practicing and developing myself. Though a thing might not have worked for me once, it doesn't mean that it's over of me. It means that I have more to learn and do. I guess my mantra is to stay true to myself and to not let the things that are out of my control define me. **B**

beed's take on the market

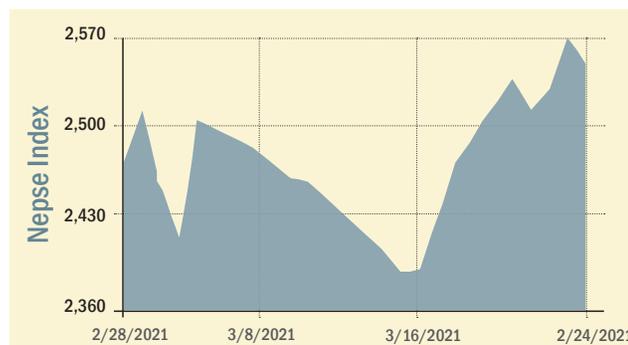
During the review period of February 28 to March 25, the Nepal Stock Exchange (NEPSE) index went up by a staggering 30.84 points (+1.21%) to close at 2584.97 points. Although the market had crossed the psychological threshold of 2,100 points from the previous few review periods and even reached an all-time high of 2,636.68 on February 18, the same spirit wasn't seen in the current review period. As a result, the total market volume during the review period decreased substantially by 54.92% and stood at Rs. 96.540 billion.

Contrary to the previous review period, four of the sub-indices landed in the green zone while five fell in the red-zone.

Hydropower sub-index (+16.44%) was the biggest gainer as share value of Upper Tamakoshi (+Rs 211), Rairang Hydropower (+Rs 109) and Radhi Bidhyut Hydropower (+Rs 70) went up. Microfinance sub-index (+7.94%) was second in line with increase in the share value of Support Microfinance (+Rs 239), Mero Microfinance (+Rs 238) and Nirdhan Utthan Microfinance (+Rs 204). Finance sub-index (+0.67%) followed suit with rise

in the share value of United Finance (+Rs 71) and Gurkha Finance (+Rs 27). The Non-life Insurance sub-index (+0.30%) also surged as share value of Siddharth Insurance (+Rs 65), Premier Insurance (+Rs 56) and IME General Insurance (+Rs 39) went up.

Meanwhile, the Manufacturing & Processing sub-index (-0.39%) witnessed decrease in the share value of Himalayan Distillery (-Rs 100) and Shivam Cement (-Rs 33). Development Bank sub-index (-2.51%) also saw fall in the share value of Corporate Development Bank (-Rs 46), Mahalaxmi Development Bank (-Rs 34) and Muktinath Development Bank (-Rs 20). Similarly, Others sub-index (-3.16%) decreased with drop in the share prices of Citizen Investment Trust (-Rs 343) and Nepal Telecom (-Rs 112). Life insurance sub-index (-3.50%) lost value with fall in the share values of Asian Life Insurance (-Rs 115), National Life Insurance (-Rs 80) and Surya Life Insurance (-Rs 56). Likewise, Commercial Bank sub-index (-4.49%) was the biggest loser with drop in share prices of Nabil Bank (-Rs 95), Everest Bank (-Rs 70) and Himalayan Bank (-Rs 46).



Source: Nepal Stock Exchange Ltd.

News and Highlights

In the public issue front, during the review period, Initial Public Offering (IPO) of Jyoti Life Insurance worth Rs 660 million was rolled out. SEBON has approved a debenture issuance proposed by Global IME Bank – '10 years 8.5%, Global IME Bank Debenture 2086/87'.

Also Sarbottam Cement and Reliance Spinning Mills have proposed to issue their IPO of six million and 1.4 million shares respectively through the book building method. Book building method allows a company to issue IPO at a higher price instead of issuing at Rs 100 per share. These are the first events of public offering being conducted through book building method. Global IME Capital has been appointed as the issue manager for Reliance Spinning Mills.

SEBON has added four IPO issues in the pipeline namely: Jeevan Bikash Microfinance worth at Rs 197.73 million, Sayapatri Hydropower at Rs 90 million, Balephi Hydropower at Rs 365.5 million and Green Ventures Hydropower worth Rs 625 million.

Outlook

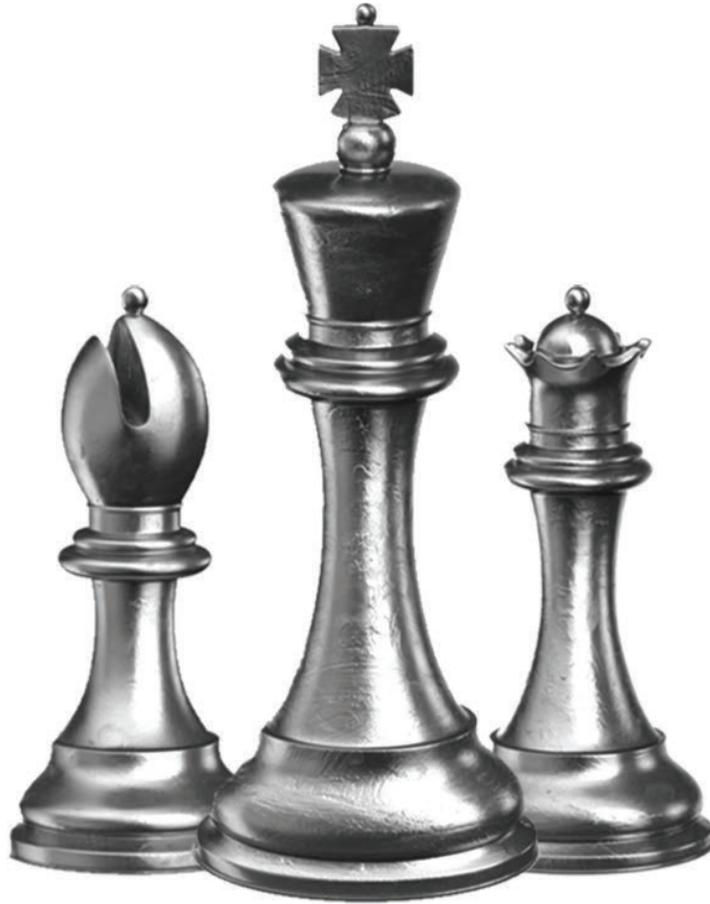
Although the secondary market has attracted thousands of new investors into the capital markets resulting in

bullish trend, the review period depicted a notable dip with the index sinking as trading volumes have weakened in the current trading sessions. As much as stock markets being cyclical is true, increased participation of companies, strong regulations and better trade settlement systems are needed to ensure a cumulative and sustained growth in the NEPSE index in the days to come **B**

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	Feb 28th, 2021	March 25th, 2021	% Change
NEPSE Index	2,554.13	2,584.97	1.21%
Sub-Indices			
Commercial Bank	1,876.83	1,792.61	-4.49%
Development Bank	2,639.40	2,573.16	-2.51%
Hydropower	2,007.03	2,336.91	16.44%
Finance	1,158.13	1,165.85	0.67%
Non-Life Insurance	12,952.28	12,991.02	0.30%
Others	2,089.76	2,023.71	-3.16%
Microfinance	4,359.56	4,705.67	7.94%
Life Insurance	17,599.22	16,983.50	-3.50%
Manufacturing & Processing	5,583.36	5,561.65	-0.39%

Source: Nepal Stock Exchange Ltd.



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New Commodities Supercycle



Vivek Risal is the Country Program Coordinator at IMFA Global, a globally reputed brand for facilitating financial markets training. He can be reached at vivek@imfaglobal.com

Acknowledging and recognising a supercycle is no mean feat especially given the scenario of the world today. For commodities, a supercycle can be explained as an extended period of enhanced demand for a wide spectrum of commodities leading to a surge in prices eventually followed by a collapse of demand and the spiraling of prices. In retrospection, the cycles are viewed as decade-long periods in which the basket of commodities trade above their long-term price trends. Market pundits and analysts have professed that a new supercycle is around the corner given the depreciating dollar and accommodative central banks and fiscal policies supporting infrastructure spending coupled with renewable energy.

Last Supercycle

As per market researchers, BRIC constituted the last supercycle. BRIC, which includes Brazil, Russia, India and China, represented 2.6 billion or approximately 40% of the global population in the year 2000. The conjecture was that BRIC nations were on a path of rapid industrialisation which suggests that the economies required an unprecedented amount of raw materials, food and energy commodities. It is said that the cycle continued for more than 10 years

starting from the turn of the millennium and concluded in the preceding decade. When the great financial crisis and the Euro crisis whipped the market dynamics in 2008 and 2011 respectively, the commodities boom started signs of a slowdown. The supercycle finally came to a grinding halt when the Chinese economy reversed from the promised lands.

Factors for Current Supercycle

The tumbling US Dollar was one of the major attributes of the last supercycle. Since the bursting of the dot-com bubble in 2001, the greenback had been on a depreciating path. As soon as the US Dollar touched record low levels in the summer of 2008, oil prices surged to their all-time high. The US Dollar had been appreciating until the pandemic factored into the value and the rates fell thereafter.

In contemporary times, the Federal Reserve has joined a host of central banks in lowering its interest rates to zero as it is leaving no stone unturned to support a weakening economy. In hindsight, a weak US Dollar feeds into inclined commodity prices. In the international markets, raw materials are mostly priced in US Dollars. Hence, a producer often requires to adjust prices upwards to offset higher production costs in the local currency value. However, a lower US Dollar means that keeping all other factors constant, commodities will become cheaper for an importing nation supporting the higher demand equation. Inflation is notably absent since the great financial crisis despite numerous warnings that zero interest rates and quantitative easing leading to roaring prices.

Regardless of the current situation, once the economies



reopen, the idea of a supercycle is further supported by increasing demand. Numerous market pundits believe that the government may not implement similar austerity policies which were applied after the last financial crisis. One of the key pillars supporting the supercycle theory is government spending which will speed up once major economies resurface from their respective lockdowns.

Commodities Gaining Advantage

Metals used in high-performance batteries including cobalt, lithium and nickel are emerging to support the transition to electric vehicles. This revolution applies to battery-focused materials along with the traditional metals including aluminum which favours building lower weight vehicles and silver which is widely used in photovoltaic installations. The demand for copper would only build due to the move to electrification.

In regard to the oil markets, organisations ranging from large corporations to small shale producers have had to cut-down their exploration budgets leading to fewer projects being explored and developed. On the contrary, OPEC members have the spare capacity to respond to stronger demand.

Supercycle Comparisons

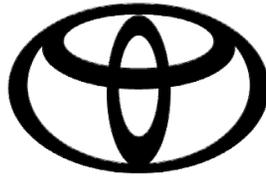
The second-largest economy China was the only economy to match the high expectations from the last supercycle. As per the World

Bank, the country increased its share of global GDP from 3.6% to 16.3%. In the last decade, China transitioned from an investment-driven economy to a consumption-driven model. The practitioners of commodity market anticipate that the strong demand will be driven by changes in the global economy coupled with emerging markets.

In comparison with the last supercycle, the geopolitical background paints a different canvas. At the start of the new millennium, China had just joined the WTO and was fueling its demand for its commodities. Two decades later, the US, China and other major economies are ironing out differences and building a better roadmap ahead where tariffs and quotas are used more eagerly.

Conclusion

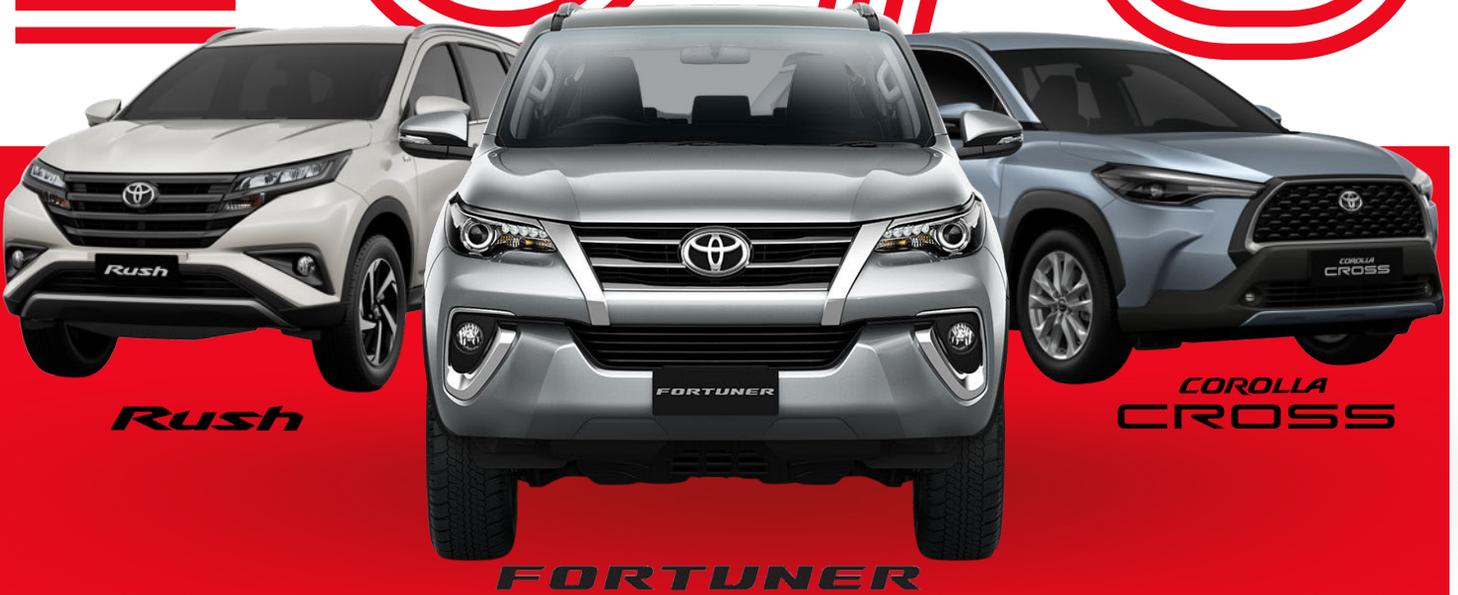
We are amid a supercycle and these supercycles come around not that often. In the last century, market analysts have presumed that only three or four supercycles were recognised. Each supercycle was driven by transformational periods of economic developments commencing from rapid industrialisation of the USA in the 1910s followed by re-industrialisation of Germany and Japan following World War II (1950s) and culminating with the growth in BRIC economies in the 2000s. All factors support the notion of the formation of a new supercycle but caution persists - are we foretelling too early? **B**



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Nepal Flying Labs

INNOVATING ON DRONE TECHNOLOGY

Text: Sajeet M. Rajbhandari



The world we live in today has grown to become dramatically different than the world we used to live in a decade ago. Be it for better or worse, technological innovations have changed the way we perceive and interact with the world around us. From ordering food from your favourite restaurant online to relying on algorithms for your next Netflix binge, technology has moved leaps and bounds over the last few decades. Not only have scientific innovations gotten more intriguing, these innovations have also managed to trickle down all the way to everyday consumer appliances that the average person uses. Amongst the vast archives

of technological innovations that have come up, one piece of technological marvel that stands out is Drones.

Early recollections of drones include seeing Hollywood interpretations of them in over-the-top spy flicks. Now it seems that drones are no longer limited to 007's arsenal; from children's toys to videography tools has found fascination among a wide range of consumers. But the truth is drone tech is not just a fun recreational gadget and people still have a limited idea of what drones are really capable of.

While fancy videos of beautiful skylines are exhilarating to see, a great deal of the potential that drone tech carries has been left unexplored. This is where Nepal Flying Labs comes in and diverges from the perception that most people have about the world flying robots.

The original idea for Nepal Flying Labs was an unlikely outcome of a national tragedy. The 2015 Nepal earthquake was a day of reckoning for many across the country.

Not only did it result in unimaginable death tolls, it also highlighted how unprepared we were for crisis situations like the earthquake. Once the dust from the earthquake started to settle, people started to look for solutions to improve the disaster response and disaster analysis systems in the country. This search led to a training program held at Kathmandu University that focused on adapting and engineering drone technology in a way that would assist in crisis management.

Institutes such as WeRobotics, DJI, and Pix4D arrived in a torn Nepal to deliver and discuss how drone tech could be used for crisis mapping. Amongst the

numerous academics and innovators that joined the program, Uttam Pudasaini, the current Executive Director of Nepal Flying Labs, was present.

For Pudasaini, who had also done his engineering thesis on “Drone Mapping”, the training presented the ideal circumstance and networking opportunity where he could envision how drones and artificial intelligence could be used for greater social good. During the training, Pudasaini along with WeRobotics came to the realisation that a singular training program would not suffice for the proper inculcation of a complex technology like drones in Nepal.

In Pudasaini’s words, “Normally during a crisis, various international organisations come, provide trainings, and then disappear. But in this particular moment, we realised that for any developing country or a country at risk, a one-time training is not a sustainable approach for the introduction of new-frontier technologies like this. Rather, there needs to be a local entity that drives these activities forward.” This vision resulted in the creation of Nepal Flying Labs, a non-profit company that has made its mission to incubate and expand social-tech entrepreneurship pertaining to drones in Nepal.

Pudasaini shares that unlike other non-profits that focused on specific projects at a time, Nepal Flying Labs aims to establish a proper ecosystem for drone use in Nepal. To achieve this, he realised that they needed to gather more people in Nepal who could assist in establishing drone services in Nepal. Nepal Flying Labs then initiated a business incubation venture that would not only allow them to network and connect with like-minded drone enthusiasts but also allow Nepal Flying Labs to assist and promote start-ups that utilised drone technology.

Pudasaini reaffirms that the goal for Nepal Flying Labs is not to be a big company by itself but rather act as an enabler that promotes drone services in Nepal. When it comes to the actual team, Nepal Flying Labs hires people on a project basis. This could range from normal administrative staff to specialised drone pilots that are capable of operating the company’s delicate equipment.

With the Nepal Flying Labs team and network in place, Pudasaini and his team sought to achieve three targets in particular: Create an ecosystem for drones in Nepal; Promote positives of drone tech in Nepal; Solve local problems through capacity building for drones.

While these are the targets for Nepal, Pudasaini says that the idea of Flying Labs is not limited to Nepal. He shares, “Flying Labs is a brand that can happen in any country. It just so happened to start its journey in Nepal.” In fact, up until the time of writing, Flying Labs exists in over 30 different countries spread across Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe.

Even within the world of drones, there exists a vast array of specialised technologies and an even wider number of possible applications. Drones can take up different form factors and a specific type of drone is built around a specific mindset. So what technologies does Nepal Flying Lab have under its tool belt, and how have they made use of it?

One of the key works that Nepal Flying Labs has been doing is to use drones to make high-resolution maps of different locations within Nepal. “There is a perception that drones are a flying camera. Just like beautiful photos and videos, we have used drones to create beautiful maps as well,” claims Pudasaini. These high-resolution maps can then be utilised for multiple purposes. Take for instance, the construction of roads in a rural area with tricky geography.

Pudasaini claims that with mapping drones, constructors can avoid having to take the risks of travelling to risky uncharted grounds without any factual assessment.

The same mapping drones can also be equally as effective during crisis situations. Pudasaini explains, “During the 2015 earthquake, the army and other responders in Bhaktapur were having a tough time figuring out where they were needed and where they were not. With drones, emergency responders could be placed on standby while drones are launched which would give them better situational awareness. It could have shown how the debris was spread and where the victims were seeking help.”

Moreover, Pudasaini says that drones can also be equipped with specialised gears such as thermal or infra-red cameras that further assist the survey process. As a result, drones are not just meant for large disasters like the 2015 earthquake but also for ones that are more commonplace like landslides and floods. To further aid the use of drones during a crisis, Nepal Flying Labs also provide disaster simulation trainings.

But besides geographical mapping, Nepal Flying Labs has been optimising drone tech to serve as cargo carriers; specifically medical cargo. Started as a pilot project in Pyuthan almost two years back, Nepal Flying Labs has been working as a connecting link between rural health posts and central hospitals in the district. The project which has a functioning range of around seven kilometers, has allowed medical workers to rapidly collect sputum that allows them to effectively diagnose tuberculosis patients in rural villages without having to waste precious time and resource.

This work done by Nepal Flying Labs did not go unnoticed. Also known as the Drone Optimized Therapy System (DrOTS), the pilot project won the coveted TIACA air cargo award and the AUVSI humanitarian innovation award for 2020. In the matter of the bigger picture, Flying Labs along with WeRobotics have acquired numerous grants from notable institutions such as Pfizer and the Gates Foundation to further develop their medical cargo drones.

As for technical infrastructure that is needed to run these projects, Pudasaini shares that they have mostly been making the commercially available drones that the average consumer can buy. Pudasaini suggests that for tasks such as mapping, it is less dependent on the complexity of the equipment and more on the technical knowhow of the team heading the project. Here, a lot of the nitty-gritty of the task lies in the compilation, presentation and analysis of the data that their small four-rotor drones collect. Even larger scale mapping projects utilise fixed winged drones that resemble planes rather than helicopters.

As for cargo projects like that in Pyuthan, Nepal Flying Labs has been running customised variants of commercial hexa-copter drones such as the DJI M600. Pudasaini shares, “Normally, these drones are meant to carry bigger cameras for things like videography, but what WeRobotics has done is that instead of something like a camera, we modified it to carry something like a hefty cargo box.”

However, these cargo carrying drones that were customised by WeRobotics were not the end of the



assembly line. While the modifications that WeRobotics made were certainly a gift to Nepal Flying Labs for its medical cargo projects, Nepal's harsh and unforgiving topography pushed them to innovate further. "Nepal's complex topography created a big problem for the automated landing systems that have been built into these drones." The inventive solution that the team came up with was to create a whole new "precision landing system." While the technical jargon might make it seem daunting at the first glance, it is the ingenious simplicity of Nepal Flying Lab's "precision landing system" that really takes the crown. "We had local tailors of the rural village sew a piece of cloth that was almost 1.5m x 1.5m. On the cloth we designed a particular pattern. Now what this does is, when the drone arrives at the health post from the hospital, it uses its camera to identify and follow the pattern on the ground to make the perfect landing," explains Pudasaini.

The work that Nepal Flying Labs has been doing is certainly making huge strides in furthering drone-based services in Nepal, but there is still a long way to go. Despite having an expansive range of applications, drones if left unregulated, can also result in equally disastrous situations. From major risks such as surveillance and terrorism, to dangers such as haphazard air traffic are things that anyone using drones should take into account.

For now, it seems that the cons to drone tech equal the pros that it carries. Pudasaini states, "People in urban areas take drones too casually. I am strongly against this sentiment, because while drones are easy to learn, if not controlled properly, it can also result in big disasters. This is why while Nepal does need to promote drones it should only be done in a proper and well-regulated manner."

In fact, Nepal Flying Labs has been taking steps to ensure a more holistic development of the drone ecosystem in Nepal. Internationally, the entire Flying Labs project has come up with a code of conduct that has been approved by over 80 humanitarian organisations. These codes dictate important guidelines that every drone mission needs to abide by from safety technicalities to maintaining data privacy. As for the national level, Nepal Flying Labs has been working hand-in-hand with government entities to create levelheaded and well researched drone regulations. This even includes a web application that when in operation will digitally simplify the permission granting process for drones to use airspace.

In regard to the future of Nepal Flying Labs, Pudasaini reaffirms the company's dedication to becoming an enabler for drone-service startups in Nepal. This even includes plans to become an entity that can provide certified professional grade piloting programs that will ultimately help with the licensing and regulation of drones. However, Nepal Flying Lab's plan for drones is not limited to just the skies, in fact the team has already been looking into aquatic drones that might help better track Himalayan glacier systems and help aid crucial environmental research.

Pudasaini and Nepal Flying Labs believe that drones are the future of transportation, and that they are bound to influence our lives in one way or the other. These intricate and nimble machines provide us with development and emergency measures that would have otherwise been unprecedented before. At the same time, Nepal Flying Labs also acknowledges the risks that drones pose and advocates for the proper regulation of these new and uncharted forms of technology. **B**

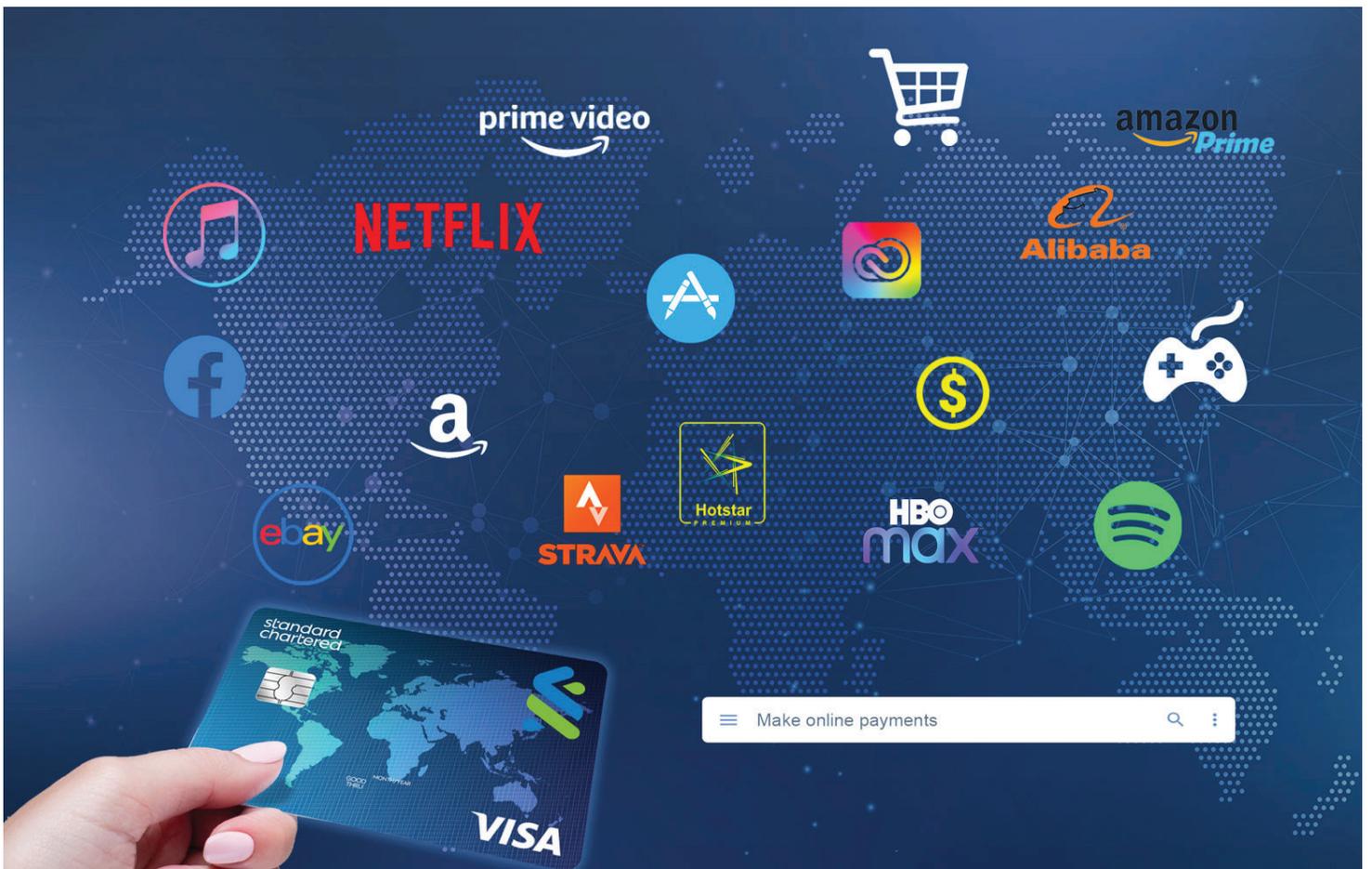
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Nissan Magnite

MEET NEPAL'S MOST AFFORDABLE SUB-COMPACT SUV



The hugely-awaited Nissan Magnite, a sub-compact SUV, was launched in the Nepali market a month back. The sub-compact SUV created quite a noise in the Indian market for its aggressive pricing and in Nepal, it's no different. The Magnite has the most affordable starting price by far, i.e. Rs 2.95 million, in the sub-compact SUV segment in the Nepali market as well.

On the exterior, the first thing that catches your eye is a trapezoid-shaped grille of Magnite surrounded by a silver, finished bezel and large L-shaped DRLs. Below the grille is a one-piece black plastic panel and a faux skid plate. The design looks sporty. Other attractive features in Magnite are a floating-type roof effect, blacked-out ORVMs, gloss back cladding over the wheel arches, chrome handlebars, blacked-out side skirts with silver inserts, and 16-inch diamond-cut alloy wheels.

The Magnite has been built on Nissan's modular CMF-A+ platform that also supports the Renault Triber and is also used by Renault Kiger. It is powered by a 1.0-litre turbo

petrol engine that makes 98.63 bhp and 160 Nm of torque and a 1.0-litre naturally aspirated petrol unit that delivers 71.02 bhp of maximum power, along with 96 Nm of peak torque; both engines will be paired to a five-speed manual transmission.

As for the interior of the car, the Magnite has cabin spaces with several variant-specific features like an 8.0-inch touchscreen with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, built-in voice recognition, cruise

control, 360-degree cameras, etc. A dual-tone theme with stitched-fabric seats, best-in-class rear knee room and couple seat distance, an all-digital 7-inch TFT instrument cluster for the driver with fuel economy and fuel history, and graphical tyre pressure monitoring, etc - available in the vehicle depending upon the variant of Magnite. The glovebox of 10 litres is the largest in the segment. However, the sub-compact

SUV doesn't have a sunroof or ventilated seats, both popular features among current car buyers.

The dimensions of Magnite is 3994mm long, 1758mm wide with a height of 1572mm and has a wheel base of 2500mm and ground clearance of 205mm when not carrying a load. Also, the car has a boot space of 336 litres which can be expanded up to 690 litres with the folding of second-row seat, and fuel tank capacity of 40 litres.

Safety wise, the Magnite comes equipped with dual frontal airbags, ABS with EBD, reverse parking sensors, around view monitor, a tire pressure monitoring system, and ISOFIX child seat anchors along with front seatbelt reminders as well as a high-speed alert system, etc.

The sub-compact SUV will be available in four trims: XE (Base), XL (Mid), XV (Upper), and the XV (Premium) in a total of 11 variants and starts at the price of Rs 2.95 million up to Rs 4.30 million. Below is the detailed price list of the Nissan Magnite in Nepal according to the variant: **B**

Variant	Displacement	Price
Magnite XE Base	999cc	Rs 29,49,000
Magnite XL Mid	999cc	Rs 31,99,000
Magnite XV Upper-Mono	999cc	Rs 34,99,000
Magnite XV Upper-Dual	999cc	Rs 35,29,000
Magnite XV Premium-Mono	999cc	Rs 37,99,000
Magnite XV Premium-Dual	999cc	Rs 38,29,000
Magnite XL Mid turbo	999cc	Rs 36,49,000
Magnite XV Upper-Mono Turbo	999cc	Rs 39,49,000
Magnite XV Upper-Dual Turbo	999cc	Rs 39,79,000
Magnite XV Premium-Mono Turbo	999cc	Rs 42,49,000
Magnite XV Premium- Dual Turbo	999cc	Rs 42,79,000

Why men should stand in solidarity with women in tech

THERE ARE MANY AT STAKE IF WOMEN REMAIN UNDERREPRESENTED IN THIS SECTOR



David Tse, Senior Director Viber APAC at Rakuten Viber

As someone who has worked with various tech companies my entire career, being part of Rakuten Viber since September last year proves to be quite a refreshing experience. People often visualise tech companies as a male-dominated space where women are often sidelined. But this isn't true for Viber. Women here are empowered to make a stand. They are not only welcomed, but they are also elevated to the most important leadership positions.

But looking at the entire tech landscape, there's still a greater need to push for more women in this field despite all the progress that has been made in the past few years, especially in Asia. A 2020 study by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Singapore's Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) showed that the number of women in the tech sector in Southeast Asia at 32% beats the global average of 28%. But it also pointed out that women's representation in tech still lags behind that of other industries in the region.

This is quite an unfortunate truth, but we men in tech should do more in promoting gender equality in our own workspace. This is not just a women's issue. It's about fighting for human rights. And to be frank, it is the smarter thing to do to ensure our company thrives in this modern



world.

Various studies have shown that women have a significant financial impact on a tech company. For instance, Fortune 500 companies with at least three women in leading positions saw a 66% increase in their return of investment, according to Forbes.

This improved financial performance can be attributed to better innovation, which is a critical aspect of a tech company's survival. Men and women obviously have different perspectives and insights, as both just don't see and experience the world the same way. So, it's only logical for companies to listen to diverse voices in making decisions. Excluding women in the workplace is turning out to be the worst and unhealthiest decision that any leader can do for its company.

As someone who is surrounded by many females in my company, I can say with

confidence that women bring a different kind of creativity and energy to our daily grind. By working alongside with women every step of the way, we at Viber are able to solve problems quickly and avoid blind spots that may later hit us in the face. We are able to see every situation from different points of view, giving us an opportunity to come up with holistic and effective solutions to these challenges.

As much as we want to bring in more diverse voices to the tech industry, there are still many factors that we have to hurdle through. One of these is education. The same BCG and IMDA study mentioned earlier reported that of all technology majors in Southeast Asia, only 39% are women compared with 56% for all other fields of study.

It also pointed out that there is still a lack of interest among girls to major in tech or related fields. This is partly because they have seen it as

too male-dominated by how it's promoted by schools. Not only that, there's also a lack of women role models in tech. And if some have decided to pursue a career tech, they are faced with difficulties in advancing their careers or they would have limited access to opportunities.

Given these, men in tech perhaps have a bigger role in ushering more women in. It's about time for us to stand in solidarity with women and put our biases aside. We can use our perceived upper hand in the workplace to make sure that women are heard, celebrated for their work and ideas, and respected on how they lead and do things—so they can pave the way for young girls too. When we give women the space to thrive, we're also giving our companies and our industry a bigger chance to solve the world's most complicated problems and help humanity in the process. **B**

Why does the business leadership gender gap persist and prevail?



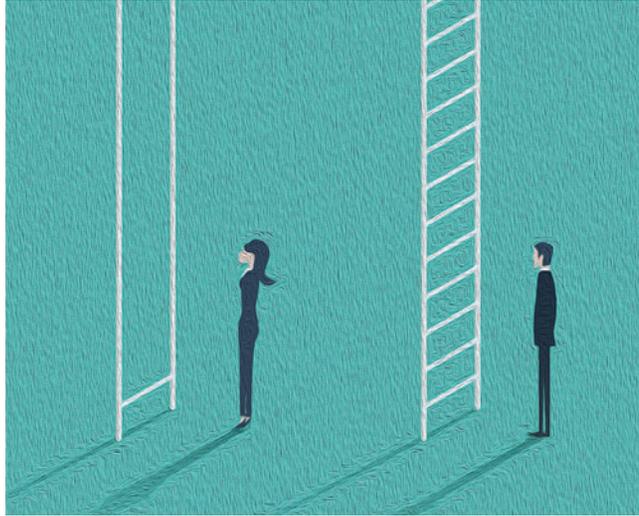
Aleena Udas Sharma, The author, a freelancer, based in New Delhi, is Program Director at EMERGE Nepal

The theme of this year's International Women's Day 'Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a Covid 19 world' couldn't have been better given the unprecedented win of Kamala Harris, the first woman and the first woman of colour as the Vice President of the United States. Her victory has paved an easier pathway for the generation of women behind her. Not that it's the first time that a woman has joined politics but this is the first time that a woman of colour has held such a high position of power.

But all are not as fortunate as Kamala Harris.

According to the UN Women, women serve as Heads of State or Government in only 22 countries, and 119 countries have never had a woman leader. At the current rate, gender equality in the highest positions of power will not be reached for another 130 years. Looking at the International Labor Organisation's recently released data, the country with the highest percentage of female managers is Jordan with 62%, and only five out of 83 countries reporting these figures to the ILO have achieved gender parity in leadership positions.

The statistics are a matter of concern as to why women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making.



Even though women hold more managerial positions than ever before but they are not able to make significant headway in the highest echelons of the business world, in executive roles, and boardrooms. What is holding women back? Why does the business leadership gender gap persist and prevail?

Broken rung and the glass ceiling

The term glass ceiling refers to the inability of women to move ahead after a certain point in their career regardless of their qualifications and experience. While very few manage to cross those artificial barriers and reach the top, there are many who struggle with the odds systemically stacked against them.

The invisible and systemic barrier that prevents women from rising to the top is not the only reason why we have fewer women as leaders; rather, it stems from the way we create and manage a talent pipeline.

Gender inequality at the top rung of the ladder can be traced down to the first promotion. According to the 'Women in the Workplace' study from McKinsey & Company and Leanin.org, it is the broken rung

i.e. the first step on the ladder to senior leadership which needs attention. When that first, equally important, and crucial step is missed out, the number of women decreases at every subsequent level resulting in a lesser number of women reaching the senior levels.

Therefore, to create a positive chain reaction across the entire pipeline businesses need to first fix the 'broken rung' to help women shatter the glass ceiling.

Stereotypes and Biases

Leadership and women are two words that don't seem to go well together for many because leadership is defined by the traits stereotypically associated with men i.e., tough, aggressive, decisive, etc. The age-old role of men and women that are so ingrained in our minds makes it uncomfortable with the idea of women having the power, to begin with.

This is why when women politicians like Margaret Thatcher, the British Prime Minister who governed Britain in the 1980s, and Indira Gandhi, the first and the only female Prime Minister of India was known for their stern,

commanding leadership style they were referred to as the 'Iron Ladies'. Thus, when women emerge as leaders, their leadership traits are inconsistent with the traits that women primarily ought to have and this leads to role incongruity.

Unconscious biases form the foundation of what constitutes leadership and eventually, organisational practices also mirror the stereotypes about who men and women are along with their respective roles.

So, how can organisations help?

Fueling the talent pipeline requires a commitment of companies to reframe organisational practices that are free from such unconscious biases and encourages women from the entry-level up. We need to change the lens through which we define leaders so that organisational policies and practices are devoid of systemic societal biases.

For this, businesses have to create a culture of conscious inclusion that eliminates inaccurate, persistent perceptions about women as leaders and encourages mentorship and leadership training programs so that the talent pipeline has an equal, if not more, number of women aspirants for a senior position.

Organisations need to walk the talk of having an inclusive environment with structured systems and practices that promote work-life balance and also challenge biases that restrict women from attaining leadership positions. Only then can we have women at all tables where decisions are being made.

We have miles to go but the journey that has gained momentum, should continue. **B**

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Government preparing to rollout 5G test from four cities

As the government gears up to test the latest fifth generation (5G) technology in four cities of the country, consumers in the selected cities will be able to enjoy the service for free during the trial phase. The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology has announced that it will soon commence the testing of 5G network in four cities of the country in the initial phase. Along with Kathmandu, the government plans to test 5G in Pokhara, Birgunj and Biratnagar.

Speaking at a discussion program held by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology on March 16, Communications Minister Parbat Gurung said that necessary technical and infrastructure studies were being carried out for the 5G test.

The Ministry has instructed Nepal Telecom to make necessary preparations for the 5G test within the current fiscal year, as per MoCIT Secretary Hari Prasad Basyal.

According to Nepal Telecommunication Authority, frequencies of 700, 900, 2,300 and 2,600 MHz under the low band, 3,300, 3,400, 3,600, and 4,100 MHz under the medium band and 26 GHz under the high band have been included in the list. Whether or not service providers will be allocated the frequencies will be fixed only after the decision of the National Radio Frequency Policy Determination Committee.



Aarogya Setu app must for flying to India

Filling digital form on India's Aarogya Setu app has been made mandatory for Nepal-India bilateral flights. Nepal Airlines Corporation and Air India have stated that the mandatory provision for digital form has been implemented in coordination between the two countries. As per a notice issued on March 15 by NAC, every passenger flying on the Nepal-India-Nepal route must download the Aarogya Setu app on their phone and fill the self-declaration form via the app.

Aarogya Setu is an Indian Covid 19 contact tracing, syndrome mapping and self-assessment digital service, primarily a mobile app, developed by the National Informatics Centre under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology of India.

According to the Air Bubble Travel Agreement between India and Nepal, flag carriers of both the countries are operating one flight daily.

For both the destinations, NAC has stated that the PCR

negative report should be uploaded within 72 hours along with the self-declaration form through the 'Air Subida' portal (Indian portal). Passengers are also required to submit the RT-PCR negative report in original and a printed copy of the self-declaration form at Tribhuvan International Airport before they are allowed to board flights.

From now on, physical self-declaration and RT-PCR report will not be accepted by Indian Authorities. NAC has stated that this rule has been issued to maintain passenger details more effectively. After a nine month hiatus, Nepal-India flights were resumed on December 16.

Public transport entrepreneurs demand revision of fare

The Federation of Nepalese National Transport Entrepreneurs has demanded the government to raise public transportation fare to match with the hike in fuel prices. Submitting a memorandum to the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure and

Transportation on March 18, the Federation sought review of transportation fare at the earliest citing rise in vehicle taxes, road charges, route licence charge, insurance premium, and prices of automobiles spare parts and lubricants.

The Federation said that public transport operators have incurred colossal losses during the lockdown period and most are still struggling to earn a living, adding that the government had not heeded their woes despite repeated requests to revise public vehicle fare.

On April 2, 2009, the government had decided to revise public vehicle fare every fiscal year, with the price of petroleum having 35% weightage and automobiles spare parts, lubricants, tyre price, loan interest, taxes and insurance amount having the remaining 65%. However, the government has failed to implement its own decision, the memorandum stated.

The Federation added that public vehicle owners were struggling to repay their loan instalments to banks as a result of sluggish economy triggered by the Covid 19 pandemic. The memorandum added that if the government failed to revise public transportation fare by the end of this month, vehicle owners will be forced to halt operation of all public vehicles.

Finance Minister Paudel vows to crack down on revenue leakages

Finance Minister Bishnu Prasad Paudel has said that the government will act strictly to stop revenue leakages. Speaking at a meeting of the Central Revenue Leakage Control Committee on March 25, Finance Minister Paudel said that the government will use all its power to control the leakages and take stern action against those involved in such irregularities.

Stating that revenue leakages will not be tolerated, the Finance Minister said, "We will pay equal attention to business growth and revenue

protection." He also urged concerned departments and security agencies to work without any negative impact on revenue mobilisation.

During the meeting, Finance Secretary Shishir Kumar Dhungana opined that it is necessary to exchange information between the Ministry, the Department and the security agencies.

Revenue Secretary Ram Sharan Pudasaini said that policy and systemic reforms are being made to control leakages. Inspector General of Nepal Police Shailesh Thapa expressed his commitment to provide all necessary assistance to control revenue leakages. Inspector General of the Armed Police Force Shailendra Khanal said that illegal activities could be stopped through regular monitoring activities.

Chief of the Revenue Management Division at the Ministry of Finance, Rameshwor Dangal said that efforts were being made by various agencies to control revenue leakages and action was being taken against those involved in such activities. Director General of the Department of Customs, Yamlal Bhusal, said that small customs offices need to be made effective.

'Protocols to Manage Tourist Arrivals' as spring season begins in Nepal

Aiming at managing tourist arrivals amid the threat of Covid 19 spreading in the country, the Cabinet meeting was held on March 18 to approve the 'Protocols to Manage Tourist Arrival'. While the spring season has started, the surge in number of people testing positive for the Coronavirus points towards a possible second wave. The government anticipates that these protocols will help curb the spread of the infection.

Tourists wanting to visit the country and wanting to go for mountaineering activities will have to submit their overall details to Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) and Department of

Nepal-India trade, transit and logistic issues discussed

Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NICCI) organised a interaction session with the Consulate General of Nepal to India Eshor Raj Poudel on March 24 at the NICCI secretariat. The session chaired by the Vice-President Sunil KC was attended by R B Rauniar, Secretary General and Convener of the Trade and Transit Committee at NICCI, Prakash Singh Karki, Chairperson of the Road and Transit Committee at FNCCI and Naresh Agrawal, Vice President of Nepal Freight Forwarders Association.

Rauniar explained point-wise how the business community can overcome the issues they have been facing with amicable solutions that will help keep the cost of doing business low and make Nepali consignment hassle-free and cost-effective in the international market. He handed over the documentation of the segregated issues that need to be seen by the Consulate General of Nepal for lobbying with concerned government and private agencies in Nepal and India.

The meeting suggested the expansion of jurisdiction of Nepali Consulate Office to work for Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. It is now confined to West Bengal only. It was also suggested that Nepal-bound cargo be allowed to ferry to any customs point at India-Nepal border via rail, thereby allowing other private sector rail operators to move Nepal bound cargo to other entry and exit customs points listed in the treaty.

Explaining the disparity between Nepal-India Transit Treaty and Nepal-India Rail Service Agreement in the case of documents requirements, he said rail moving cargo require submission of copy documents only for the purpose of Indian custom clearance as per RSA; whereas road movement cargo are asked to submit original documents for Indian Custom Clearance, even though it is not made mandatory to submit original documents as per Article 3 of the memorandum of protocol of the Nepal-India Transit Treaty.

The meeting also discussed that Nepal has implemented ASYCUDA World in all major customs points and the Government of India uses ICEGATE at its customs points for the same reason. It was suggested that these two systems should be integrated as the EDI connection would help in better risk management as well as CTD automation and document harmonisation to make transactions transparent and help simplify procedures at the port in Kolkata.

Tourism (DoT) respectively. The board and department will then forward the applications to Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Department of Immigration (DoI). The tourists will be able to come to Nepal only after receiving approval from the Ministry and DoI. Similarly, tourists who do not have visa service for Nepal in their respective countries can get on-arrival visa.

Tourism stakeholders have been asking the government to resume on-arrival visa service as the tourist season has started and a number of interested visitors are unable to get visa

for Nepal in their countries. However, the on-arrival visa service will not be applicable for tourists travelling via land.

Before travelling to Nepal, tourists should have a negative report of PCR test conducted within 72 hours before the flight, a recommendation letter from the DoT or NTB, hotel booking details, insurance documents and other required documents.

Meanwhile, the quarantine policy has not been changed. Tourists will have to stay in quarantine until the result of PCR test done here comes negative. In case of

Indian tourists, rules will be applied on the basis of air bubble agreement. Along with implementation of the protocols, all other rules and regulations implemented earlier regarding tourist arrivals have now been scrapped.

PATA Nepal Chapter concludes 44th AGM with the theme "Nepal: Celebrating Gastronomical Mastery Beyond Himalayas!"

The 44th Annual General



Meeting of Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Nepal Chapter themed "Nepal: Celebrating Gastronomical Mastery Beyond Himalayas!" concluded on March 5 at Park Village Resort, Kathmandu. Chairman Bibhuti Chand Thakur during his welcome remarks emphasised the top ten immediate priorities of the hour that Nepal as a destination must address to ensure its better preparedness and restart tourism towards rapid, robust and responsible recovery. These include waiving off of the mandatory quarantine, on arrival visa and PCR tests, easing entry for vaccinated travellers, training, and retraining of human capital with new normal protocols, vaccine to tourism service providers, compliance with safety protocols in service backed with monitoring and controlling mechanism, massive awareness and training programs on HHS throughout the nation, enhancing collaboration and partnership, smart marketing approaches, etc. He also shed light on the PATA Nepal Chapter's Priority Action and Initiatives for the year 2021 and invited the entire tourism fraternity to work together to build-back-better the tourism industry.

PATA Nepal Chapter had

invited Nepali celebrity chef Santosh Shah as the keynote speaker for the 44th AGM. Shah urged the tourism fraternity of Nepal to emphasise two major segments of tourism services: hygienic food and quality accommodation with utmost priority to cleanliness and sanitisation in order to win the trust and confidence of travellers in the post-pandemic scenario as well as to present Nepal as a promising destination for culture and cuisine beyond the Himalayas!

During the Award Presentation Ceremony, PATA felicitated Dipendra Purush Dhakal, Former Secretary of Ministry of Tourism of Nepal with the Lifetime Achievement Award; Tourism Trail Blazer Award to Dr. Mario Hardy, CEO of PATA International; Best Student Chapter of the Year 2020 Award to Silver Mountain School of Hotel Management (SMHM); and Personality of the Year 2020 Award to Chef Santosh Shah.

Government offers additional reprieve to hotels, restaurants

The government has decided to give additional respite to hotels and restaurants, one of the sectors most affected by the Coronavirus. It has been decided to give electricity demand fee exemption to hotels and restaurants that are registered at the Department of Industry. The license of such hotels and restaurants must have been renewed regularly and they should have submitted tax returns.

The government has decided to waive 100% demand fee of such hotels and restaurants for the lockdown period. It has also decided to give 50% discount on electricity demand fee to them from mid-October when the lockdown was lifted. The decision was taken on March 18 and made public on March 21.

Nabil Skill Hero Award & Skill Week 2021



The second edition of Skill Week 2021 was held amidst a special gathering in the presence of prominent entrepreneurs, government diplomats and professionals by Glocal Pvt Ltd with the aim to promote skill development. Skill week was held to help youth to explore, get engaged and educated in various skills and had a series of workshops and competitions to make it engaging and effective.

The closing ceremony of Skill Week 2021 and the Nabil Skill Hero Award was held in the presence of Sonam Wangchuk as guest of honour. He is from Ladakh, India and is an engineer, innovator and education reformist, also recognised widely as the inspiration behind the Bollywood blockbuster, 3 Idiots. The four distinct skill areas of Art and Culture, Entrepreneurship, Tourism and Hospitality and Science and Technology were focused on and four distinct personalities and achievers were honoured with the Nabil Skill Hero Award.

In Tourism and Hospitality, Gagan Pradhan, MD of Himalayan Java; in Arts and Culture, Kutumba Band; in Entrepreneurship, Shanti Chadha, Founder President of FWEAN and MD of Nepal Woman Crafts; and in Science and Technology, Pavitra Bahadur Gautam, Co-Founder and CEO of Karkhana were honored.

The jury members for Nabil Skill Hero Award by Glocal were Nona Deprez, Ambassador, Delegation of European Union to Nepal and Dr Upendra Mahato, Chairman of the Mahato Group.

FNCCI to support 50 start-ups

The Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) decided to raise investment from 50 entrepreneurs to support 50 startups. The newly-formed Startup and Innovation Committee (SIC) of the federation will select the best 50 start-ups for investments.

According to the SIC Chairperson Ranjit Acharya, the scheme has been brought under a two-year programme. Stating that businesses based on latest concepts in any field can apply, he said the shortlisted candidates will have to compete among themselves to prove their feasibility and business prospects.

Investment will then be provided to the final 50 on the basis of need and possibility. The Federation will open applications in first week of April. Companies wishing to participate in the competition must have audited financial transactions for at least one year. The Federation will screen the applications and prepare the first list by the second week of May. The companies selected in the first list will then be called for interviews that will take place in the last week of May. Around the second week of June, FNCCI will make public the list of 50 companies that will receive investment from FNCCI. Mentorship to the selected startups will be provided for three months from July. Following the mentorship, startups will pitch their ideas in the first week of October.

NIBL launches 'Thaili'

Nepal Investment Bank announced the launch of its own digital wallet service, Thaili on March 17. The launch of Thaili comes just weeks after Nepal Rastra Bank lifted previously placed restrictions and increased the amount of money transferrable through digital mediums.

Thaili Digital Wallet is a



IME Remit honoured for paying highest income tax on remittance



IME becomes the company that pays the most income tax on remittance in the country for the fourth time. During a function organised by the Inland Revenue Department on April 1, Ram Sharan Pudasaini, Revenue Secretary, Ministry of Finance presented a certificate of appreciation to

Chandra Prasad Dhakal, Chairman, IME Group honouring IME Remit as the company that pays the highest income tax. Although the announcement was made last November on the occasion of Tax Day, the event could not be held formally due to Covid 19.

IME, established 20 years ago, is credited with institutionalising Nepal's overall remittance business and is the first company in Nepal to bring remittance to Nepal through banking channels from abroad.

Nepal Investment Bank Mobile Money Wallet application that quickly and securely allows you to send, receive, check balance and spend money at Zero Transaction Cost. Thaili Digital Wallet is both a mobile banking and mobile wallet application. Through its mobile application and web portal Thaili.com.np, Thaili enables Nepal Investment Bank Clients to link their bank accounts to Thaili Wallets and make instant payments to any other Thaili Wallet User at Zero Transaction Fees. Thaili Wallet will also enable various P2P Fund Transfers, and Cash-In, Cash-out through its Agent Network. Agents and Merchants can soon avail separate Thaili Agent Wallet that will allow Bank appointed agents to enroll new wallet users and provide Cash-in and Cash-out Services. Nepal Investment Bank has also launched a new loan product called Thaili Overdraft that aims to provide SME Loans and overdrafts to Kirana Stores, Merchants and Small Businesses that avail Thaili Wallet Services.

KTM lifts the covers off the all-new KTM 250 Adventure

KTM announced the launch of KTM 250 Adventure

on March 18 while also commencing bookings at KTM showrooms across the country for the KTM 250 Adventure which is priced at Rs 749,900.

KTM 250 Adventure is launched with the mission of expanding the emerging and rapidly growing segment of adventure motorcycles in Nepal. Its elder sibling, the KTM 390 Adventure captured the imagination and aspiration of enthusiasts. The KTM 250 Adventure is expected to further grow the franchise by encouraging customers to take their first step into the world of adventure biking. Outstanding handling and engine punch come in a lightweight package with this latest addition to the legendary KTM Adventure family. Using elements of its larger displacement siblings, the KTM 250 Adventure is an extremely agile offering that forms the ideal entry point to the Travel-Enduro world. Combining top-spec components with the latest technology, the KTM 250 Adventure sets the benchmark in the rapidly growing adventure segment. The KTM 250 Adventure will be available through exciting and affordable ownership plans too, the details for which will be made available at the KTM showrooms.

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Jawa Perak hits the streets in Nepal



Agni Moto Inc, a subsidiary of Agni Group and the authorised distributor of Classic Legends in Nepal, launched the Jawa Perak with a BS-VI engine across all Jawa motorcycles dealerships on March 19.

The Jawa Perak is available at an introductory price of Rs 750,000 and motorcycle enthusiasts can now book this factory custom motorcycle and test ride it in the following Agni Moto Inc dealers - Birtamode, Dharan, Itahari, Biratnagar, Lahan, Pokhara, Narayanghat, Butwal and Bhairahawa.

Jawa Motorcycles' latest model "Perak" was unveiled by Sharad Mishra, General Manager and Pratyush Shrestha, Sales Head of Agni Moto Inc in the presence of media.

During the program, Sharad Mishra said, "The Jawa Perak breaks the norms of conventional motorcycling and elevates the standards by quite a few notches with its distinctive 'factory custom' styling, dark demeanour and the quintessential single seater 'bobber' stance. Packed with latest technology, the motorcycle offers a superlative degree of performance and handling to delight riders across various terrains. We are proud to present this modern marvel to the bike enthusiasts in the country."

Jawa Perak is distinctive Bobber that embodies the spirit of Stealth, Vigilante and Dark in a factory custom avatar. The Perak is powered by a 334cc liquid cooled, single cylinder, four stroke, DOHC engine, producing 30.64PS of power and 32.74 Nm of torque, breathing out through signature twin Jawa exhausts chopped for the authentic bobber stance.

The higher torque

directly translates to better pulling performance both from standstill and rolling acceleration. This has been achieved with meticulous fine tuning of the engine coupled with the new cross port technology that ensures thrilling performance while delivering cleaner emissions compliant with BSVI regulations. All this power is put to the tarmac via a 6-speed transmission with ratios optimised to offer a great riding experience through the gears.

The bike is housed in a completely reworked chassis with an all-new swingarm, engineered to offer the optimum transverse, longitudinal, torsional rigidity. Frame and swingarm stiffness have been tuned for a linear feel, aiding stability over straights and poise along winding roads. This plays a significant role in improving the handling.

Piaggio launches Aprilia SXR 160 in Nepal

Piaggio and MV Dugar Group announced the launch of Aprilia SXR 160, the first scooter to be designed under the new Aprilia design language, on March 7 at an introductory price of Rs 409,900 across all dealerships in Nepal. The event was inaugurated by the Chairman and Managing Director of Piaggio India, Diego Graffi; Chairman of MV Dugar Group, Moti Lal Dugar; Vice Chairman of the Group, Vivek Dugar; and Vice President of the Group, Vijay Mahato.

Diego Graffi, Chairman and Managing Director, Piaggio India said, "We are delighted to launch the much-anticipated premium scooter, Aprilia SXR 160 for all our distinguished customers in Nepal, the Aprilia SXR 160 is an epitome of great style, high performance and great comfort is specifically designed in Italy, we believe that this scooter will set high standards in the Nepal's premium two-wheeler market and will be a testament of Piaggio's upcoming plans for Nepal."

Aprilia SXR 160 incorporates Aprilia's latest global design language and is fitted with a single-cylinder, 4-stroke, air-cooled, 3 valve fuel injection clean emission engine technology, that produces peak power of 11 PS at 7100 RPM. To deliver the best riding experience and highest level of comfort, Aprilia SXR 160 offers bigger, longer, comfortable and ergonomic seats, crafted in art leather suede feel, detailed with special stitch pattern in grey and red threads. The sharp body lines, geometric contours and high craftsmanship reflect the dynamic premium appeal of SXR 160. The scooter comes with a 12V, 5.0 Ah MF battery and a fuel capacity of 7 litres.

SXR160 complemented with 3 coat HD body paint finish, featuring Aprilia signature graphics, paired with matt black design trims inserts along with dark chrome elements. The wrap around LED technology twin crystal head lights and eye line position lights merges with front indicator blinkers to create its unique light play; the diamond reflection wrap around LED taillights with integrated rear blinkers equally generates the much-sought new age appeal. The SXR 160 comes with an Anti-Lock Braking System (ABS) along with ventilated disk brake and twin pots calliper hydraulic brake which delivers high braking performance. Aprilia SXR 160 is available in Glossy Red, Matt Blue, Glossy White and Matt Black colours.

Summit Woman of the Year 2021



Summit Hotel and Open Space Network jointly organised the Summit Woman of the Year 2021 to recognise and honour business women below the age of 30. There

were a total 160 applicants from six provinces, 18 cities, out of which the top 26 were shortlisted and from there the top five were selected as finalists. They were: Twinkles by Jaya Rajbhandari, Leklekk, The Green Wave by Jayaswi Rai, Tittofritto Foods by Arunima Shrestha and Urusha Shrestha, Learn Infinity by Aditi Goyal and Pure Joy by Binita Pokhrel.

The judges were Anil Keshary Shah, Shreejana Rana, Corey O'Hara and Vidushi Rana. The title went to Arunima Shrestha and Urusha Shrestha, two sisters and business owners of Trittofritto Foods. They won a cash prize of Rs one lakh.

Bajaj's new showroom now in Achham



Hansraj Hulaschand & Co, sole authorised distributors of Bajaj motorcycles in Nepal, inaugurated a fully facilitated new showroom 'Shuvekshya Auto Trade and Suppliers' in Achham on March 9. Bajaj launched the new showroom in Achham with a vision to provide fully facilitated Bajaj's sales, services and spare parts throughout the country. To support this vision dealership has been granted to Bharat Khadka, Proprietor of Shuvekshya Auto Trade and Suppliers in Achham. Inaugurating the new showroom in Achham, Yogain Gurung, General Manager of Hansraj Hulaschand & Co. said, "We are extremely delighted to announce our new showroom in Achham. Our customer base is growing steadily and it becomes our responsibility to serve our customers properly with satisfaction. With this new showroom at Achham, we are hoping to make our customers' lives one step easier and give an opportunity to experience Bajaj motorcycles."



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Nokia 1.4 launched in Nepal



HMD Global, the home of Nokia phones, announced the launch of its latest smartphone - Nokia 1.4, on March 1. Boasting an impressive screen real estate which stretches to 6.51 inches edge-to-edge, it's almost a full inch bigger than its predecessor, and the largest ever to feature on a 1 series Nokia.

Ravi Kunwar, Head of Pan Asia, HMD Global, said, "We increased the size of the screen on the Nokia 1.4 to the maximum capacity so parents, carers and children can stay connected and productive. To further enhance the photography experience - on top of the improvements already brought to you by Google's AI on the Camera Go app, we also added a macro camera to capture epic close-ups at home or outdoors. All powered by Qualcomm, a trusted industry leader, and encased in a tough, mishap-proof body with our signature two-day battery life1."

The new expanded HD+ screen comes into its own with video calling apps, helping families to stay connected amid the current climate, and showcases the Nokia 1.4's camera capabilities.

The dual camera setup coupled with Camera Go app by Google helps you take high quality photos at any time, even under low light conditions. Capture precious family moments with Portrait Mode that lets you achieve professional-looking photos with blurred backgrounds. Use Night Mode to take colour-rich and crisp low-light shots without the need for flash. Helpful storage indicators will take away any worries about

space so you can carry on snapping.

The built-in macro lens will entertain the whole family as kids get up close and personal with slugs, bugs, and flowers while exploring the great outdoors and come in handy at home when you need to zoom in on the fine print on the latest utility bill.

Staying true to Nokia smartphone values, the Nokia 1.4 is ready for Android TM10(Go edition) and beyond. It offers a faster, more secure way of doing things with our unique Android promise and at least three years of security updates, you can rest assured your phone will stand the test of time on the inside as much as on the outside.

Built-in parental controls allow users to manage content downloaded from Google Play store, and will give grown-ups the peace of mind to allow children to listen, learn or play until their hearts are content.

The Nokia 1.4 is available in Grey and Purple with 2GB/32GB configurations at Rs 12,899.

Construction Solutions Nepal receives 'Certificate of Appreciation'



Construction Solutions Nepal, authorised distributor of Hyundai Heavy equipment in Nepal, was presented a 'Certificate of Appreciation' along with a Star Award from Hyundai Construction Equipment India on March 16. The 'Certificate of Appreciation' was awarded in the presence of Jin Seog Park, Managing Director of Hyundai Construction Equipment India for maintaining No 1 position in Nepal Excavator Market for the year 2020. It has been the market leader in the excavator segment for the

past 3-4 years in Nepal. "We would like to thank Hyundai Construction Equipment India for this recognition and their tremendous support throughout. We would thrive to be no 1 in the upcoming years and continuing our hard work and effort in the industry. We are immensely grateful to our valuable customers and our dealer partners for their hard work and consistent efforts. Without their continuous support this achievement would not be possible." said Sandeep Sharda, Managing Director of Construction Solutions.

Hyundai Excavator has 27% market share in excavator segment in Nepal. Hyundai machinery has long served as a solution to the construction, utilities, batching, quarrying and mining industries and has helped many operators achieve real success through efficiencies, reads the press statement.

Everest Bank starts contactless monetary offering at Sh. Janaki Temple, Janakpur through QR Code



In an effort to promote digital based banking facilities to large and well spread out sections of the society, Everest Bank started contactless monetary offering at Sh. Janaki Temple, Janakpur through QR Code service on March 11. The service was jointly inaugurated by Dr. Sandhir Kumar, Dy. General Manager at Everest Bank and Ram Tapeshwar Das, Mahanta, Janaki Temple, Janakpur. During the ceremony, Dr. Sandhir Kumar, DGM, EBL highlighted that with this unique arrangement, devotees can make monetary offering through QR Code which will be deposited in real time at the bank account of Sh. Janaki Temple maintained at Janakpur Branch.

Unilever Nepal Limited introduced "#UNMUTE, End the Silence on Domestic Violence" campaign

UNMUTE
END THE SILENCE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Unilever Nepal Limited, on the occasion of International Women's Day, 2021, pledged to not only create a safer community at work but also to try to be the one of the voices of change for Nepal. Through its campaign #UNMUTE, End the Silence on Domestic Violence, it is committed to speak up against violence and to support not only its employees but their families with education, awareness and resources around safety. It aims to reach women across its ecosystem and educate them on their rights as well as provide access to resources like a toll-free helpline, provide counselling and access to NGO services, access to 'safe leave' and flexible working conditions for survivors.

Unilever has framed a Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy to protect and support its employees from domestic abuse. This extends the scope of employee well-being beyond work that is the office to his/her personal life and home. The stand on Domestic Violence from Unilever Nepal comes at a time when a significant number of its office-based staff are working from home. Domestic abuse thrives in secrecy and creating an environment where people can disclose their experience without stigma is what the policy seeks to do.

Unilever Nepal Limited also organised a Virtual Panel discussion aligned with the campaign #Unmute.

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Ramesh Corp commences a new beginning



Ramesh Corp, a diversified conglomerate of Nepal that comprises of a multitude of companies across ten verticals, has commenced a new beginning to honour and carry forward the legacy of its visionary Chairman Emeritus late Shri Ramesh Gupta. The brand commenced its new journey with the unveiling of its new brand name, visual identity and a brand tagline that reflects the brand's founding vision that drives it towards a better tomorrow.

"This commencement of our new beginning is extremely special to all of us as it represents a significant step in our brand's evolution. We are redefining who we are, driving change and shaping our future as we remain grounded to the vision and principles laid by our founding father," said Sushil Gupta, Vice Chairman of Ramesh Corp. "With our new philosophy of "Forward Together" we aspire to reach new heights by maintaining a system of excellence in our operations that enriches and enhances the life of everyone who comes under the Ramesh Corp fold."

"We will continue to strive and lead the change with innovation, build collaborative relationships and reshape the future by creating an ecosystem that is based on trust, respect, mutual growth and excellence for everyone -whether it be the employees, the partners, or the customers," said Rohit Gupta, Vice Chairman, Ramesh Corp.

Startup and Idea Fest 2021 to be held in all seven provinces

Living with ICT is going to organise Startup and Idea Fest

2021 in the major cities of the seven provinces. Starting in the first week of April, Idea Fest will feature local startups and people with innovative ideas. The program which will start from Biratnagar in mid-April will conclude in the second week of the same month in Dhangadhi, a Sudurpashchim state.

The organisers stated that innovative projects from local startups and students working in the field of technology can participate in the competition. Event Officer Muskan Prasai said that registration opened



from March 14 and will continue till April 7 and informed

that startups or ideas can be registered on the official website.

The best startup products will be showcased at Startup and Idea Fest 2021. The fest will feature mentoring and business growth sessions for startups, as well as Hackathons in collaboration with Code for Change, stated the organisers. The best start-up from each state will get concessional loan facility of up to Rs 1 million. Similarly, seed funding of Rs 300,000 will be provided for the best ideas, said Razan Lamsal, Chairman of the organising committee. The best among the states will be honoured at the ICT Award 2021.

Standard Chartered Nepal awarded with 'Excellence in Learning and Development'



Standard Chartered Bank Nepal Limited was awarded with 'Excellence in Learning and Development' at the first ever award session of the HR Meet 2021 held on March 26 organised by Growth Sellers, an independent HR consulting firm. The award was presented to the Bank in recognition of its effort to consistently develop the skill sets of its employees and for providing the necessary

motivation to grow. The award winners in various categories were decided by an esteemed jury consisting of veteran personalities from the HR domain of Nepal. On the first day of the event, Anirvan Ghosh Dastidar, CEO of Standard Chartered Bank Nepal, was keynote speaker, where he shared his views on "HR as strategic partner - changing the way we work."

Sun International Inc launches Baskin Robbins in Nepal

Jyoti Group has associated with Sun International Inc. (SIPL) to promote Baskin Robbins, now present in 11 cities with more than 16 retail outlets. Jyoti Group ventured into FMCG business in 2017



with SIPL which has been in the ice cream business for years with a distribution channel and offices across Nepal and expanding rapidly. "Our Vision is to become the world's favourite ice cream brand and to be the most preferred ice cream brand in Nepal. Our core value to provide quality products and best service at all times, to make the stores the best it can be, to make every guests visit the best part of the day," reads the press statement.

Inspired by global standards, the flagship parlour at Uttar Dhoka is serving 31 flavours - the unique forte of Baskin Robbins, while also maintaining the systematic food safety plan on daily basis which is verified by the daily audits.

Zonta Club Kathmandu honours inspirational women on Yellow Rose Day

On the occasion of International Women's Day, Zonta Club of Kathmandu celebrated their annual 'Yellow Rose Day' on March 7 to honour 12 'Inspirational and



Courageous Women' for their achievements. The event was organised in the capital and the categories and awardees for this year were:

Princess Helen Shah Award: SSP Kiran Bajracharya for her fight against human and girls trafficking.

Amar Rana Game Changer Award: Shristi KC: Founder of Blind Rocks

Ratna Devi Award to Covid Heroes: Lily Thapa and Ayushma Rana Yakhumba

Jyoti Scholarship Award: Suprima Poudel who has published thesis on "Impact of Credit risk on performance of A and B class institutions" in Journal of Nepal, NRB Economic Review.

Women in Tech: Melisha Gimire who is Managing Director at Girls in Tech Nepal and Program Manager at Women in Big Data SEA Region.

Indrakala Scholarship Award: Sanskriti Phuyal who works for the mission of "Sports in Equality" and conduct sports for girls at school

Women in Space : Reja Thapa who discovered main belt asteroids during 2019-2020 through All-Nepal Asteroids Search Campaign.

Zonta Club of Kathmandu also awarded Rs. 35,000 each to four women under the title of Unsung Heroes:

Sakuntala Kumari Budha: A 15 year old who successfully ran the campaign against Chhaupadi Pratha in Kalikot.

Sumitra Shrestha: First female plumber working for over 13 years in the profession.

Sahanshila Sharma Jha: First female priest for Annapurna Temple in Ason

Radhika Thapa: First female army personnel who complete Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare Training.

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Nabil Bank felicitates Chef Santosh Shah



Nabil Bank has launched the second edition of the 'Heroes of Nepal' series which was initiated in 2019 as a platform to recognise Nepalis who have achieved extraordinary feats. In an event organised at the National Academy Hall on March 25, Nabil Bank kicked off the second edition of the Heroes of Nepal series by felicitating Chef Santosh Shah for putting Nepali cuisine firmly on the map and making the entire nation proud. During a panel discussion between Chef Shah, Anil Keshary Shah and Anushka Shrestha, Chef Shah not only spoke about his inspiring achievements but also shared the challenges of his journey through life. At the event, Nabil Bank also committed to providing financial assistance to build an e-library and scholarships for five girl children belonging to Chef Shah's hometown, reads the press statement.

Xiaomi unveils new line up of products



Xiaomi launched four new Mi Smart TVs, Mi Portable Bluetooth Speaker (16W) and Mi Beard Trimmer 1C to their product category in Nepal on March 29 and with this the brand plans to go through deeper into the accessories and ecosystem.

Expanding its portfolio of smart TVs, Xiaomi launched a new Mi TV 4X 65-inch model in Nepal. This model features a 65-inch 4K display with HDR support and comes with

in-house Android-based Patch Wall UI. It is powered by the quad-core Amlogic Cortex A53 chipset, paired with a dedicated Mali GPU, 2GB of RAM and 16 GB of internal storage. Other three TVs announced are Mi TV 4A 43 inch Horizon Edition, Mi TV 4A 40 and Mi LED TV 4A 32

Sourabh Kothari, Country General Manager- Xiaomi Nepal said, "We are thrilled to introduce these categories to our product portfolio in Nepal with the launch of these exciting TVs. With our content first philosophy, we hope to bring each Mi TV user a unique experience with a personalised interface. Mi TV, with its fantastic software redefines what a Smart TV means, and stays true to our innovation for everyone philosophy. We hope it will be loved by our users and Mi Fans in Nepal."

Mi TV 4X 65-inch 2021 Edition, 4A 43 inch Horizon Edition, 4A 40 inch Horizon Edition and 4A 32 Edition is available for Rs 119,999, Rs 46,999, Rs 37,999 and Rs 34,999 respectively whereas Mi Portable Bluetooth Speaker (16W) is available for Rs 2,399 and Mi Beard Trimmer 1C is available for Rs 1,799.

Hyundai announced New Year 2078 scheme



Laxmi Intercontinental, the sole authorised distributor for Hyundai automobiles in Nepal, has launched its New Year 2078 scheme, "Yo Naya Barsha 2078, Hyundai Chadau Aghi Badhau". Under this scheme, customers can get attractive New Year benefits in each model of Hyundai vehicles which is available across all Hyundai showrooms in Nepal. The scheme offers attractive cash discount, additional cash discount from Rs 20,000 to Rs 78,000 through scratch card, loyalty bonus worth Rs

15,000, Exchange Bonus up to Rs 100,000 and free one-year comprehensive insurance. In addition, Hyundai also offers three years warranty and now provides six years free service on the purchase of new Hyundai car.

'Kshamadaan' by Ganesh Prasad Lath released

Nepa~laya released Ganesh Prasad Lath's book "Kshamadaan" on March 5.



The novel exfoliates the drama, intrigue and tragedies surrounding the business families from Madhesh. The book is the first release of the year from Nepalaya 2021 catalogue. "Madhesh has produced some brilliant writers from Dhanush Chandra Gautam to Bimal Niva to name a few. Their works have expressed the aesthetics and poetics of Madhesh wonderfully. But as a reader, who happens to be a businessman, I couldn't locate myself in most of the books published in Nepali," the writer said, explaining his inspiration for writing the book. "The businessmen were either completely absent in literature, or thrown in as typecasts when they appeared. I wanted to explore the humane side of those families through my stories."

Lath came of age in Birgunj, one of the first three municipalities of Nepal, during the years when Nepal was eagerly building infrastructures to stabilise democracy and open-market system. Lath's growing up intersected with the upsurge of movie theatres in Birgunj. The cinematic storytelling and its wide appeal impressed Lath greatly. Not surprisingly, the book imbibes similar dramatic techniques, which the author believes will hit familiar notes for those admiring romantic social dramas.

"We are committed to publishing pluralised voices," Bhushta Vasistha said, explaining the editorial opinion on the book. "Business families form a significant part of Madhesh demography, and are probably amongst those to be heavily affected by the political instability the country has been embroiled in for the last several decades. Their stories, evolution and dynamics are a quintessential part of Nepali narrative, which is still not sufficiently reflected in literature. With this book, we hope to cover that lack, no matter how insignificantly."

Lath is the second author from Birgunj to be published by Nepa~laya. Girish Giri's eponymous non-fiction Birgunj was published in 2016.

Ganesh Prasad Lath's 'Kshamadaan' is priced at Rs 495 for the Nepali market and is available in all leading bookstores of the nation.

The Rana Cookbook: Recipes from the Palaces of Nepal launched



Authored by Rohini Rana, The Rana Cookbook: Recipes from the Palaces of Nepal was launched recently in the capital. The book is a labour of love and painstaking research done by the author over three decades and published by Penguin Random House India. This book does justice to a previously unknown area of Nepali cuisine and is being recognised as a worthy addition to the compendium of South Asian cookbooks. The author took on the project when she realised that the old Rana recipes would die a natural death if not documented and the cookbook is a gastronomic flashback into the Rana era kitchens.

FIFA must act on labour abuses as World Cup qualifiers kick off, says Amnesty International

Ahead of qualification matches for the 2022 Qatar World Cup, Amnesty International is calling on FIFA to use its leverage with the Qatari authorities to help end the abuse of migrant workers. In a letter to FIFA President Gianni Infantino, Amnesty called on FIFA to live up to its responsibilities to prevent, mitigate and remedy human rights risks connected to the tournament, and to “use the full extent of its influence” to urge Qatar to fulfil its programme of labour reforms before the World Cup kicks off.

Qatar has made a number of positive reforms in recent years, partly in response to increased scrutiny after the World Cup contract was awarded, but too often these are not properly implemented and thousands of migrant workers continue to be exploited and abused. Recently Qatar’s Shura Council, an advisory body, put forward a set of recommendations which, if accepted by the government, would undo much of the progress brought about by reforms, including by re-imposing restrictions on the rights of workers to change jobs and leave the country.

“This World Cup simply would not be possible without migrant workers, who comprise 95% of Qatar’s workforce. From stadiums and roads to hospitality and security, the tournament depends on the hard work of men and women who have travelled thousands of miles to provide for their families. But too often, these workers still find that their time in Qatar is defined by abuse and exploitation,” said Steve Cockburn, Head of Economic and Social Justice at Amnesty International.

“As the World Cup organising body, FIFA has a responsibility under international standards to mitigate human rights risks arising from the tournament. This includes risks to workers in industries like hospitality and transport, which

have expanded massively to facilitate the delivery of the games. This week’s qualifiers are a reminder that the window for FIFA to influence Qatar is closing – it must act now to ensure that the 2022 World Cup is a tournament to be proud of, and not one tainted by labour abuses.”

When FIFA decided to hold the World Cup in Qatar, it knew – or should have known – that there were inherent human rights risks, due to the country’s heavy reliance on migrant workers and its exploitative labour system. Consequently, FIFA knew, or ought to have known, that migrants working in all sectors related to the delivery of the World Cup, whether directly linked to official sites or not, would suffer to make it possible.

On 15 March, Amnesty wrote to FIFA and called on it to live up to its international human rights responsibilities. Under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, FIFA must ensure human rights are respected in the organisation and delivery of the World Cup, including by carrying out its own independent and regular monitoring of World Cup projects and venues, and conducting due diligence to identify and prevent any human rights abuses associated with the tournament. Crucially, FIFA also has a responsibility to ensure that all harms suffered by workers on World Cup-related projects to date are properly remedied, in cooperation with the Qatari authorities and other relevant stakeholders.

“FIFA must use its voice to urge Qatar to urgently implement and enforce existing reforms, and to reject proposals to strip workers of their newly gained rights,” said Steve Cockburn.

Amnesty acknowledges the steps FIFA has taken in recent years to live up to its responsibilities, including by establishing its 2017 Human Rights Policy and a joint FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainability Strategy in October 2019. FIFA has pledged to leave “a legacy

of world class standards and practices for workers in Qatar and internationally”, but the continued prevalence of serious labour abuses shows there is much to be done.

For example, in 2020 FIFA told Amnesty International that the “day-to-day due diligence” of construction workers’ rights is carried out by the Supreme Committee, the government body overseeing the Qatar World Cup.

This hands-off approach was shown to be deeply insufficient when Amnesty found that construction workers on the €770m Al Bayt Stadium had worked for up to seven months without pay. The Supreme Committee had known about this for nearly a year, but FIFA admitted that it was unaware, demonstrating why FIFA needs to be far more diligent in independently monitoring World Cup sites.

Several Amnesty International offices around the world are now calling on football supporters to sign a petition,

urging FIFA to do more to help transform conditions for the workers making the tournament possible. Amnesty International offices in 27 countries also wrote to their national football associations in November 2020, urging them to play an active role in ensuring the rights of migrant workers.

Meanwhile concerns over ongoing human rights issues in Qatar have been growing among football supporter groups in a number of countries, with some calling for a boycott.

“FIFA must take the concerns of the footballing community seriously and take concrete action. FIFA has an opportunity to help leave Qatar a better place for migrant workers, but the clock is ticking,” said Steve Cockburn.

“FIFA and Qatar must put in place a robust plan of action to ensure the migrant workers across all sectors associated with the World Cup have been paid properly, treated fairly, and are free from the control of exploitative employers.”

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“TREAT PEOPLE WITH KINDNESS. TEAMWORK IS THE PROMINENT FACTOR THAT KEEPS BUSINESS IN THE RUN FOR A LONG HAUL. YOU HAVE TO BE KIND TO YOUR TEAM MEMBERS, COLLEAGUES AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE EMPLOYEES”

Text by: Jesika Oli



Jigme Sherpa

Co-founder Jump KTM Indoor Trampoline Park

The Co-founder of Jump Ktm Indoor Trampoline Park, Jigme Sherpa is a business graduate of Baruch College, New York. On returning to Nepal, he started work as an administration officer in a hydropower company, simultaneously engaged with his parent's real estate business and their NGO. But the pull to create his own venture proved stronger and he established Jump Ktm in February 2021. Sherpa also co-owns The Old House Restaurant at Durbar Marg.

The idea for Jump Ktm was formulated on one of his visits to Thailand, and it immediately struck a chord as he was aware that there was a huge gap for family entertainment in Nepal, especially something that was refreshing, energetic and fun for kids and youngsters alike. But it's not a place just for youngsters and that is obvious when you visit the place and view people of all ages having fun at Jump Ktm.

On weekdays, Jump Ktm has an average of a hundred visitors and on weekends it caters to 400 people. With the immediate popularity it has gained in such a short time, Jump Ktm is already planning to expand into two more places inside the Valley, and in the next year have branches in Pokhara and Butwal.

In this edition of Business 360, Jigme Sherpa talks about his favorite brands and business lessons he has imbibed from them.

3 Brands/people/campaigns that you have learnt something from

Steve Jobs: He brought Apple to new heights of success. In his commencement speech at Stanford University, Steve Jobs had said “Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish” and I keep replaying it in my mind. It basically means never to be satisfied with what you have and always try to push forward. We have to take risks and learn from our mistakes. That’s how I moved into the business of entertainment. Jump Ktm being a new business model in Nepal, even my family was uncertain if it would bring the expected results. However, I stood by my decision.

Denzel Washington: He is one of the finest actors in Hollywood. His quote “Dreams without goals are just a dream” really motivates me. Everybody has dreams but not everyone’s dreams get fulfilled. You have to set goals to accomplish the dream. I start with small goals and push myself forward towards my dream by achieving those small ones first.

Nike: I was always fascinated with Nike. Nike has been my go-to brand ever since my childhood. Nike inspires me by its innovations and adaptation to the new markets. It has recently collaborated with Cole Haan bringing comfort into formal shoes which I wear a lot.

Your work philosophy

Treat people with kindness. Teamwork is the prominent factor that keeps business in the run for a long haul. You have to be kind to your team members, colleagues and most importantly, the employees. Employees are the backbone of a company which is why we have to be kind and generous to their contribution.

Top 3 apps you use the most

- WhatsApp and Viber
- eSewa
- Alibaba

3 destinations within Nepal you want to travel to

Upper Mustang: I want to go on a ride to the whole circuit of Upper Mustang and Manang. I want to visit Upper Mustang especially for horse riding.

Gokyo: My friends were there last year and the place seems mesmerising, especially the lake.

Dolpa: Dolpa being a historical place, I want to explore more of Tibetan culture in this region.

A woman-run business you think deserve accolades

Vision Craft: Led by Yanchen Dolkar, Vision Craft is an online store of sunglasses and shades that has recently been introduced in Nepal. She has brought amazing sets of fashionable shades targeting the young energetic people of Nepal.

Entrepreneurs who inspire you constantly

Elon Musk: In 2018, when Tesla was on the verge of bankruptcy, most of the board members were planning to opt out to file bankruptcy. However, Elon Musk did not give up on his company and invested his last money to rebuild the company. He inspires me to believe in my dream and stay strong even in the worst phase of my life.

Jeff Bezos: I was always curious to know how Amazon has been capable of managing its large scale business. In this quest, I watched a documentary that featured the shipping process of Amazon. I came to know that Amazon has thousands of mini robots placed inside its warehouses. Once we place the orders, the robots take the orders,

pick them and deliver by themselves. Jeff Bezos always comes up with new ideas and technologies to increase the efficiency of his service. I am always fascinated by innovative ideas which is why he inspires me with his efficient management skills.

A non-profit organisation you want to donate to

I would like to donate to my parent’s NGO, Cunina. My dad has put a lot of effort into building this NGO. They started with sponsoring one student, and to this date the NGO sponsors 1500 students for their education. They have also built schools, clinics and hospitals. I want to contribute to this organisation so that it can sustain its good efforts for the long term.

The best work advice you have received so far

My parents always taught me that kindness is the key to happiness. My mother always says that we need to make others happy for us to be happy. My parents advise me to create a positive and happy environment in my company.

3 Nepali startups you think deserve the spotlight

- Tootle
- Zapp
- Vision Craft

2 Nepali companies whose PR strategies are spot-on

Ncell: It has been a few years that companies of Nepal have started taking marketing as a valuable part of business. You see Ncell wherever you go. They are on commercials, social media and in the malls.

Chaudhary Group: CG has taken over almost every sector of Nepal. It has its stakes in finance, education, consumer goods, real estate, biotech and more. A good PR strategy should be one of the many reasons for its increasing expansion of business.

If you could change ONE thing about the present entrepreneurial scene in Nepal, what would that be?

I think the younger generation of entrepreneurs has to enter the market and explore beyond their family business. Most youngsters continue with their family business and do not push themselves to explore beyond what they already have. If young minds venture out for innovation and look out for technological advancement, Nepal can have many innovative startups.

Five words to encapsulate Jump Ktm

- Exciting
- Alive
- Fun
- Stress Release
- Loud (people always scream out in excitement at Jump Ktm)

Who would you want to collaborate with for Jump Ktm?

There is a Trampoline franchise called “Bounce”. Since we are planning to branch out into several cities of Nepal, a collaboration with Bounce could give us clear insight on franchising strategies.

If Jump Ktm were to participate on Shark Tank, what would be your one line pitch?

“Anyone can walk but we can jump at Jump Ktm.” **B**

“IF YOU OBSERVE IT CLOSELY, EVERYTHING IN NATURE FALLS INTO PLACE EVENTUALLY. IT GETS HURT, IT HEALS, IT GROWS AGAIN. IT TAKES ITS TIME. IT CALMS AND ENCOURAGES ME TO BELIEVE THAT EVERYTHING HAS ITS OWN TIME. NATURE IS A GREAT TEACHER”



SUBHEKCHYA TIMOTHY
Director, Ekta Books

Subhekchya Timothy grew up surrounded by books and is one among three sisters. The elder one is a dermatologist and the younger sister is at university, thus shouldering the family business fell on her. “Since it is a family run property, as long as I can remember while growing up, I was always at Ekta Books. I have always been around books. Moreover, there used to be a small crib among the books at the store where I used to sleep when I was small,” recalls Subhekchya.

One of her fundamental duties at Ekta revolves around publication. Currently, she is busy working on the new curriculum. As per government directive, the new curriculum for grades 1 to 12 will be implemented by 2023. “There is a lot to be done. We are very occupied with it. There are other projects also, something digital,” she shares on a guarded note.

Ekta, which celebrates its 40 years in business next year, publishes all subject textbooks for school level and some for higher levels. They also have an extension in academics and children literature. Dictionary publication was their 25-year-old project and presently, they have 12 series of Nepali-English, English-Nepali, Nepali-Nepali dictionaries and more to come; something the publishing house is proud of.

Subhekchya completed her MBA from ACE Institute two years ago. She was actively involved with Storytellers Nepal for almost four years. “Prashant Manandhar, the founder, is my

teacher. When he initiated it, he asked 4-5 of us to work with him; that's how we started it together. I was in the final year of my undergrad at that time. I used to look after logistics and event management."

Subhekchya's has a predilection for music which she credits to her genes from her maternal side. Her mother, Salomi Timothy is a known singer in the Nepali Christian community. "As long as I can remember books, I remember singing. I sing in choir and I have a band called Emunark. We are more into gospel music," she informs.

During her conversation with **Ujeena Rana**, Subhekchya Timothy shares the five aspects of her life that have helped shape who she has become today.

Running a family business

My father, Ram Chandra Timothy, believes that one needs to learn every feature of the business. And it is indeed essential to understand different standpoints; from sales to customer dealing to administration. At Ekta, I started with customer service as National Sales Coordinator. Learning about the production aspect of the business kept me occupied. Now I am developing my strength in the same.

When you are young and recently graduated, your mind oozes with ideas and you think that there is so much that you want to do. And we witness events where schisms grow between generations. Nonetheless, the secret to a successful family-run enterprise is communication. When you listen to the other person and everything is on the table, you get the bigger picture. More importantly, at the end of the day, it is all for the company

so you must pick out what strategically works for the company. That is how it should work. A concoction of the new generation's perspective and the experiences of the older generation works best.

Many of my relatives congratulate my father on his good fortune on having a daughter to take care of the family business but I know the pressure that comes with the job. I know that I have big shoes to fill. It's more than about whether I wanted to do this or not. When I travel around the country so much of what my father has done and achieved and the effort of all these years he has put into the education sector fills me with a sense of pride. I can't ever shake the feeling of the impact he has had on people's lives. I need to continue his legacy. Even if it was not my interest, I always knew that it makes sense for me to work here.

We were handed certain values and values do not change. I would thus want to continue being guided by them. And while we cater to the needs of the present time, we will continue to be guided by our internal core values.

I am my own person

I wanted to be a doctor when I was growing up. I was not always certain that I wanted to get into the family business. However, this is not to say that I sacrificed myself at the altar of the family's interest. In retrospect, I was always around my parents; I was on the sidelines watching my father; I used to accompany my family on business trips. I was just there. Definitely, there were other interests but it is just that my upbringing and my personality converged at Ekta. Stars aligned and I happened to take up the job. I suppose the writing was on the wall.

Talks on diversification is ongoing. Even though education sector is our primary concern, we want to explore other business verticals like agriculture and tourism or agro-tourism. I am personally excited about the new things we want to usher into our family business.

We have not made our plans public yet; we are still tweaking our ideas. However, West Bengal, India, where our books business is already in place, has witnessed our first venture into tourism business. There is a lovely village called Sitong where we are developing homestays and agro business will follow suit. And at the head office in Siliguri we have Yaksha Holiday Home, a guest house. Slowly, we will penetrate the agro-tourism section in Nepal as well.

Best life decision

Once I got an opportunity to teach teenagers and children at our church. Rather than about teaching a particular course subject like English or Maths, since it was a Sunday school run by the church, I used to teach parables to the kids. The experience brought me closer to understanding them, understanding the next generation. And during certain instances while dealing with them, I got to introspect.

What delighted me the most about dealing with children was their innocence. Of course, children are mischievous by nature. But the experience exposed me to children with different

personalities and taught me to not be judgmental but to cater to their needs and curiosity accordingly. They are fertile soil and you are planting on them and eventually something good will come out of this generation. I thought that teaching was a genuine act that I could do.

Greatest source of inspiration

I draw inspiration from nature. If you observe it closely, everything in nature falls into place eventually. It gets hurt, it heals, it grows again. It takes its time. It calms and encourages me to believe that everything has its own time. Nature is a great teacher.

I travel for business and pleasure and every time I visit a different place, I experience something new about life. It is pretty relaxing for me to witness nature and the life lessons it imparts. Mountains, oceans, seasons, day and night, everything about nature schools us about something valuable.

Promoting reading culture

To know that someone else is out there who shares similar feelings or viewpoints is a great relief. And that is what books do to people. People find a sense of belongingness in books. Besides, because you read, you grow the habit of listening. You observe, analyse and it helps in communication.

Avid readers will always love books. There are certain people who are into music or movies or photography and don't have time for reading; however, whatever genre you have interest in, there is a book on it. When people gravitate to a certain genre, they want to quench their thirst for knowledge and books avail that. **B**

EASE ANXIETY WITH EXERCISE



Sandesh Palungwa Limbu, Certified professional fitness instructor, founder of RAGE Fitness, and specialises in mixed martial arts.

I note with great concern the increasing levels of stress, anxiety, depression and mental wellbeing issues that people are struggling with today, especially young people. I also find a lot of people blaming it on externalities of how competitive today's environment is, how difficult urban living is, how complicated relationships are, and how technology has exposed us to things we desire and can't have and the consequent struggle for more. And of course there are heredity issues and chemical imbalances in the body that are hard to understand. And now we have the added pressure and uncertainties of living in a pandemic.

But if you really think clearly about it, is this anomaly not just of our own making. What stops us from taking charge of our health, our bodies and our minds, whatever the situation?

Today, more and more people suffering from anxiety are turning to pills and alcohol and struggling to live an active and balanced life. While medical attention and care is absolutely essential, it must be deeply understood that your wellbeing ultimately lies in your own hands. The environment you choose to live in, the food you eat, the life you lead,



the thoughts you think, the information you intake and the company you keep all have a direct impact on your health and wellbeing.

Here, I only wish to emphasise on the importance of exercise to your mental wellbeing. Exercise is a powerful tool that you can use to enhance your physical and mental health. Numerous studies show that exercise can help manage anxiety and is the best choice to reduce stress levels. Please note that exercise won't cure anxiety and depression but the physical and psychological benefits help improve symptoms. At least 30- 45 minutes of moderate exercise five days a week will make a significant difference.

Benefits of exercise are seen especially in people who exercise consistently. Immediate improvements are seen in people who have never exercised, are not physically active, or those who have severe anxiety. Aerobic exercise is especially recommended to

improve your physical fitness and get your heart to work more efficiently. During aerobic exercise the heart rate goes up but as your fitness levels improve, your resting heart rate between exercise sessions eventually becomes slower. This leads to your becoming calm, and with the improved heart and lung function you enjoy a greater sense of wellbeing which offsets feelings of anxiety. Exercise also improves mental clarity and concentration besides a host of other benefits including improving your immunity and freeing up energy.

I strongly recommend that if you have not exercised before and are not physically active, you start with small but consistent habits like walking. Break it down into 15 minutes walk, three times a day if you can't do it all at once, but start and keep going. Yoga, deep breathing and meditation are excellent ways to help cope with anxiety and heal you.

If you are dealing with

an anxiety disorder, I would also recommend that you first consult with your doctor as your medical history and current medications will play a role in your ability to exercise and what type of exercise you should do.

Covid 19 is a stark reality but if you are taking the necessary precautionary health and hygiene measure, you will be safe. If you feel continually stressed by the pandemic, please see a professional. While it is normal to have some level of stress and anxiety due to the situation, prolonged anxiety and stress must be addressed monitored. Again, small mindfulness practices and exercise can help to a large extent.

Most importantly, find something you enjoy doing; exercise should not become another reason for you to dread or fret about. Instead it should become a lifestyle habit that gives you joy. **B**

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When **Paul-Emile Victor** was researching the ice-cold arctic region in 1936, his Longines chronometers continued to work accurately – helping him to calculate the longitude when he dared to cross the Greenland ice cap. “These watches made the difference between failure and success”, Victor stated.



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THROUGH THE MYSTIC EYE

ABSOLUTE ATTACHMENT IS REALISATION



Sadhguru. Named one of 50 most influential people, Sadhguru is a yogi, mystic, bestselling author & poet. Sadhguru has been conferred the “Padma Vibhushan” by the Government of India in 2017, the highest civilian award of the year, accorded for exceptional and distinguished service.

Many so-called spiritual teachings are given that essentially say that attachment is bad, so do not get attached to anything. These kinds of teachings and misunderstandings have come because of the pain people go through with attachment. Teachings of detachment and being desire-less come because of the fear of entanglement. Entanglement always creates pain and suffering within a person. So, somebody gave this foolish solution – be detached. According to them, the solution for life is to avoid life! If someone wants to avoid life, you have to choose death! It is very simple. Being alive but wanting to die and not dying is going to be torturous. If you want to live, you need involvement.

People think spirituality means dropping your wife, husband or family. But please see, this has nothing to do with spirituality. You will anyway want to drop them when it becomes inconvenient. You do not become spiritual by dropping someone. The biggest attachment you have is not your wife, child, bank balance or something else – it is your personality. This is what you need to throw. Your deepest sense of attachment is to your

own thought and emotion. You may argue, “No, my wife, job and child are dear to me.” But when your wife, child or the situations around you really go against the way you think and feel, you will drop all of them. You will not drop your ways of thinking and feeling but you will drop the other person because the other person has stopped fitting into your life. They are in your life only because they have made the compromise to agree with whatever you think and feel.



So you do not have to really work on your attachments with people around you. You need to work with your attachment to your own body because it is only when you are deeply attached to your own body that you get attached to somebody. If you release yourself from this, you are free from everything. If you are not attached to your own body, you can be deeply involved but unattached. Teachings that say “Do not get attached” are not going to work unless it is experientially clearly within you that “this body is not me.”

There is a nice story about this. Once, Indra, the king of all gods, came to earth seeking pleasure. He chose the form of a pig because generally, in terms of physical pleasure the form of a pig is considered best. He found himself a beautiful female pig, married her and produced dozens of piglets with her. Over time, he got very deeply involved and attached to them.

The gods waited patiently in heaven thinking it was a short pleasure trip but when Indra did not return for a long time, they came down and saw this whole pig-business in progress. They tried to reason with him to give up the pig’s life and return to the heaven. But Indra was so deeply involved and attached to all this, he just grunted and left.

The gods then decided to kill one piglet hoping that the tragedy would make Indra realise his true nature and return. But, suppose you have

five children, and you suddenly lose one, you will cling to the remaining four harder. That is the way. If you lose one more you cling to the remaining three even harder, isn’t it? For every piglet killed, Indra clung to the remaining ones harder. Eventually, the gods killed all the piglets.

But Indra got busy producing more children. Then the gods thought that Indra’s real attachment was his wife so they killed her. Now he was greatly distressed. Soon his pig friends and relatives suggested he take another wife. They always do this, isn’t it? And the whole pig-business started again.

The gods were now completely at a loss with this when Narada, the wise sage, was passing by and happened to see all this. He said, “Why did you kill his wife and kids? His attachment is to his body. Destroy the body.” So, the gods cut his body into two halves and

Indra came out and said, “What the hell am I doing here?” and returned to heaven.

The bondage with the body is deep. That is the source of all attachments. If you can truly get attached to another being, it is truly wonderful and fantastic but when you get attached to your own body, you become so limited. So, you do not have to go on searching for non-attachment somewhere else or distancing this and that in your life. You simply need to know how to distance yourself from your own body. Yoga is a complete science, a tool and technology to bring about this sense of separation and freedom from the accumulation of the body.

Whether you like it or not, in your breath, body and being, you are in an inseparable attachment with the whole. So, do not hesitate about attachment. Do not listen to all those teachings about detachment. Right now, with all these teachings that attachment is bad, you are hesitating to be involved. Freedom will not come because you make yourself exclusive. Freedom comes only by including everything as a part of yourself. If you include everything as a part of yourself, then you will have no identity left; that is yoga.

Yoga means attachment. When you get attached to the whole Existence, you are in yoga. Or when you realise how inseparably you are attached with the Existence, that is your Vishwaroopa – Universality. Let your attachment be indiscriminate. It will lead to bliss. It is selective, prejudiced attachment that causes pain.

The beauty and the grandeur of life is known only to one who is indiscriminately and absolutely involved with all that is. This will not only make you attached to everything, but also dissolve the small self that you have created. **B**



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SEPIDEH KEYVANSHAD
MISSION DIRECTOR, USAID/NEPAL

Sepideh Keyvanshad serves as the Mission Director for USAID/Nepal.

A career development professional, Sepideh has worked within the US Government in various roles including the Department of State and the National Security Council, and as a Foreign Service Officer with USAID since 2000. She has been posted overseas with USAID in Afghanistan and El Salvador and has served with international and non-governmental organisations in Russia and Haiti.

Sepideh has broad experience working with and across development and government institutions, and her career has focused on supporting governance efforts as well as institutional and organisational change around the world. She holds a MS degree in strategic studies from the National War College, and Juris Doctor degree from the University of Illinois College of Law, and speaks Farsi and Spanish.

Ujeena Rana spoke to Keyvanshad to learn her views on leadership. **Excerpts:**

What areas has USAID Nepal been working on in Nepal?

This year, we are celebrating 70 years of relationship between the US Government and Development Assistance from the US Government to Nepal. And in those 70 years, we have been working on everything -health, education, economic development and environment. Throughout the years, USAID has pretty much worked in almost all sectors and the way we have done our work has also evolved; moving from direct service delivery to strengthening systems of the government, working with

“ WE TALK ABOUT SELF-AWARENESS; COUNTRIES ALSO GO THROUGH SELF-AWARENESS. I DO THINK THAT THE US STILL HAS A KEY LEADERSHIP ROLE TO PLAY IN THE WORLD. AT THE SAME TIME OTHER COUNTRIES ARE GOING THROUGH THEIR OWN PHASES AND THEIR OWN STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT AND EVOLUTION. SO, THE QUESTION IS: HOW DOES THE US PLAY THE LEADERSHIP ROLE VIS-À-VIS OTHER COUNTRIES?”

civil society groups, working with governance issues, and we have done a lot of work in terms of for e.g. eradicating malaria, HIV Aids.

We are just starting implementation of our new five-year strategy. And within that, we are involved in democracy and governance, disaster risk reduction, resilience and reconstruction, health and education, food security and natural resource management energy. One of the things is that our government has had a very good relationship with Nepali government and that really helps with our Congress to be able to continue to provide support to Nepal.

A lot of what we did in the past year was responding to Covid 19. When the pandemic hit, our Mission got working very quickly to provide assistance under the health sector, but also in education, helping the Ministry of Education help students continue to learn; also providing economic assistance because a lot of people were losing their jobs and not being able to take care of their families. So we started providing small grants through some of our programs, many of them going to women.

What are the challenges of working in the development field?

I think there is a lot. The key thing that a Development Agency tries to do is to change the way things have been done. It really tries to go against the grain of how societies were run, how they are managing

themselves, how institutions run in order to make them effective. And we obviously focus on science and data when we work on health and education and we bring in a lot of concrete things. But at the same time, development requires a different way of thinking, it requires a different way of managing interests, it requires a different way of managing power. And I think that is the really difficult part of doing development because you are helping move a society in a direction that is different and there are interests that have been there for decades and centuries. Pushing against that and trying to move different people at different times is what is really difficult. And that's in any country; this is not just in countries where USAID works. It is pretty much all over the world where you try to make change. It is very difficult to go against what others have been doing for a long time.

I think part of the other challenge is as someone who has been a foreign service officer and has moved from country to country, it's difficult, but also the more interesting part of doing the work is that you go to different places, you spend time getting to know the context, getting to know the country and its people, really figuring out how that society moves, and how it behaves and what motivates it and what are its incentives. It can be challenging but it's also incredibly fulfilling because you learn so much and it expands your perspective as a human being, at the very best.

What are the things that inspire you to work as the Mission Director to USAID Nepal?

I wake up every day inspired and I keep saying this—I absolutely love my job. I wake up every morning realising how lucky I am. What truly inspires me is the realisation that I have an amazing opportunity and privilege to create this environment and space for other people to come in and do better for themselves and do better for their families, neighbours, communities and countries because in some ways, I see my role not as a doer but as an enabler. I have this incredible privilege of having the resources of my country to be able to go in and do that. To bring in different voices, different experiences, to give opportunities to people who may not have had that before and it goes back again to being able to push against those challenges of development I talked about of moving a society in a different way by bringing in people who were not participating in making those changes. So for me, the older I get and the more I do this, it really inspires me every day to be able to do that.

What do you consider your most significant accomplishment with USAID Nepal?

My own sense of personal accomplishment has really evolved as I have gotten older and as I have done this longer. Had you asked me my personal accomplishments ten years ago, I would have said, let me tell you what I, Sepideh

have accomplished. At that point, it was about me and my accomplishments. For me, that's not the case anymore. Because the more I do this, the more I realise and the more I like the fact that it's not about me. It's what I can help other people accomplish. So my personal biggest accomplishment in many ways is having that recognition. The more I become successful in taking myself out of the equation - that is my accomplishment.

As far as the USAID is concerned, the biggest accomplishment has been the relationships it has allowed the people of my country to build with the people of Nepal; being able to dig into the smallest communities and to not just build relationship with one layer but between different layers and we are trying to get even below those layers. The organisation's accomplishment is being able to give the people of Nepal the opportunity to realise their own worth, their own potential, power and their own solutions to their own problems while giving resources to be able to do that. For me, it's not what the US government is doing for you or what Nepal is doing for you, it is how we are creating a relationship between our two countries and our communities for all of us to solve these problems together.

Though Women's History Month is behind us, discourses around women empowerment and women in power position are an ongoing process. It was interesting to see that the appointment of Kamala Harris as the Vice President of the

United States was taken as no less than a celebration. You being in an important position - what do you think 'women in the power position' entails?

I think, for me, women in power entails just that - having a woman in power. It was wonderful to finally, after centuries of having perfectly qualified women, to have a woman Vice-President and for a President to have finally selected one. However, we still have ways to go because the President was elected; she was not elected.

For me having more women in positions of power entails progress; it entails recognition from a wider segment of our world what many of us already knew, which is that women are perfectly capable of doing all these things that we have not allowed them to do, that we have not supported them to do. It is about people's decisions catching up with the reality of the world of women's capabilities and women's experience and their power. I think that is what 'women in the power position' entails for me.

What defines a leader?

Anybody can be a leader. You can be a leader in your home; you can be a leader in your community; country and the world. I think in many ways leadership means recognising that you have this power to lead other people, and it comes in many forms. What's also interesting is that the definition of leadership has also been changing and what people see as a good leader or a capable leader has also been changing and I think that's a good thing. Certain qualities that were praised or looked for in leaders were not necessarily the best. And there were certain qualities that I think do make good leaders, those were not being recognised. As I see the progression of my own career in the past 20 something years and as I look at people in my own organisation, my own country or people around me who have been leaders or who have had positions of



authority I see the definition of leadership and leaders changing.

My first job at USAID I had a boss, I have actually gone through many of these bosses whose definition of leadership was about exerting power; it was about exerting your authority, and it was about your image as a leader and generally it was a man. Generally, it was

a man who we were a little bit afraid of, and they were not afraid to come to a meeting and having everyone being afraid of them, and that was perfectly acceptable at some point.

On the other hand, coming to a meeting and showing your emotions was not really accepted, except for anger... anger was acceptable. And I think that is changing and I

believe that is a good thing. Going into a meeting and showing your humanness is okay and going into a meeting as someone who is leading that meeting and kind of being okay telling people 'I don't know the answers; let's do this together' has been okay.

I don't need to go into a situation where people think that I have all the answers.

“ A GOOD LEADER SHOULD REALISE THAT IT IS NOT ABOUT YOU BUT YOU HAVE TO KNOW YOURSELF. YOU HAVE TO KNOW WHAT YOU DON'T DO WELL AND YOU HAVE TO FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO WITH THAT. SOMETIMES THAT MEANS BRINGING OTHER PEOPLE WHO DO THOSE THINGS WELL THAT YOU DON'T DO WELL.

Besides, bringing more of your outside work persona into your work is also becoming more accepted. These are some of the things that I see changing. I think we are still figuring that out, I think men are figuring that out, I think women are figuring that out. I think men are probably trying to figure out how do they bring those other parts to themselves that they were not allowed to bring in. We as women are also figuring out how to bring those qualities, those that were called unprofessional and unacceptable by the society.

There are a lot of people around the world who are really good leaders. In terms of qualities that makes someone a good leader: s/he can't make it about them. If your leadership is about you, that makes you a selfish leader and I don't believe that that person really connects with the others. So first of all, to be a leader you have to be able to come out of yourself and your own interests and what does it mean to you or what does it do for you. The other thing is, someone who can connect not just with the people but to the situations that they find themselves in, because situations are different and it requires different ways of dealing.

I worked in Afghanistan for a long time. It was a high profile job and I had to make decisions at the drop of a hat. There were often dangerous situations. People, including our implementers, were literally dying. It required me to work in a certain way which is very different from the way I work here. I think being a good

leader is about being able to connect with people, but also being able to connect with situations so that you can determine what is needed by the situation and by the people at that particular time. Being a good leader is about being able to adapt yourself. In some ways, you have to become a chameleon but in a good way so that you can understand and feel the situation and the reality to it.

A good leader should realise that it is not about you but you have to know yourself. You have to know what you don't do well and you have to figure out what to do with that. Sometimes that means bringing other people who do those things well that you don't do well. You become more humble since you recognise that you are not perfect and that you don't do everything well so you don't expect perfection necessarily from everyone and that also allows you to work as a team.

Anybody who embodies your definition of good leadership?

For me when I think about that, it is not Presidents or people from history. It is about a former boss I had at USAID and it was a man, and he was the kindest, most thoughtful person. Everyone loved working with him. In some ways, he lit up the room when he walked in. I knew I always had to know my stuff when I walked into the office to brief him but I also knew that I always walked away having learnt. I was briefing him but I would always walk away learning from him at the same

time. Every time I think about the kind of boss I want to be, he is the person who is always stuck in my mind. He was kind, thoughtful, smart but he took care of his people also.

What does America as a global leader signify to its own people and to world at large?

It is not a surprise to anyone that the US has been going through a difficult time, especially in the past year. We have been going through a lot as a country, as a government, as people in different parts of the US, as just individuals and families. We have been trying to make sense of what this means to us individually and as a community. Some of us are having a difficult time talking to each other and figuring out how we could reduce the divide internally within our own country. There are these fault lines internally within the US that some knew, some felt, and some did not feel as much so as to address it. Moreover, what we are going through internally, obviously, has been viewed by the rest of the world.

But like individuals, countries also go through different phases and different stages and for the US and its people the good thing - the positive thing - among the many not so positive things that have happened is that there is a stronger recognition of some of the issues we have to deal with as a country. This, in many ways, has made us more self-aware as a country now and this impacts our internal domestic policies, which ultimately impacts our foreign policy.

Therefore, I do think that the US still has a key leadership role to play in the world. At the same time other countries are going through their own phases and their own stages of development and evolution. So, the question is: how does the US play the leadership role vis-à-vis other countries?

We did go through a very difficult period and it really was a shock to many of us what happened in January. We are

still absorbing what happened. But I am optimistic that we are learning from what happened and we are going to use that learning and put it to good use to deal with issues that our own country is facing. At the same time, we are also committed towards working with other countries who are dealing with similar problems in many ways and carving a way forward.

When do leaders know when to hang up their boots?

We have lots and lots of people in positions of power where they should hang up their boots. But that's different from leadership. I don't think anyone necessarily needs to hang up their hats or boots at any time when it comes to leadership. I think leadership evolves. The question is: when do you as an individual transition from one type of leadership to another type of leadership because leadership is not just about being a CEO of a company or being the President of a country. You can play different leadership roles. So the question is: at which point are you better off leaving a specific leadership position, a position of authority, a position of power and then transitioning to a different one where you can play a different type of leadership role?

Speaking about myself, I am already thinking about when is it a good time for me to leave my position or my agency or to leave what I do and then move into a space where I am better suited, because what happens when people stay in a position too long is they sometimes become less effective and at the same time they are hoarding the space that others could actually come in and bring in new, fresh, innovative ideas and they are not giving the opportunity to do that. So part of our job as a leader is to vacate that space and to allow others to come in and do their own way of leadership and fill that space with their ideas. **B**



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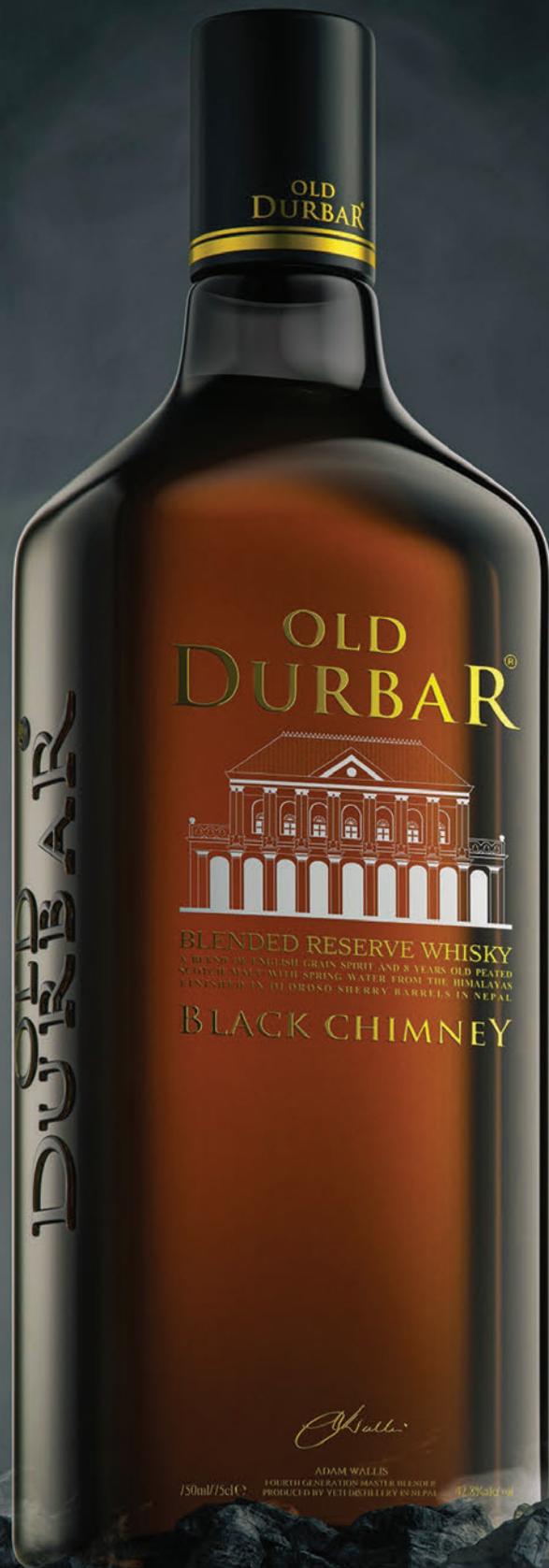
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