

Crisis in Province 2 government

Divisions appear in RJP-Nepal

Kathmandu: The differences between the two Madhes-centric parties—Socialist Party-Nepal and RJP -Nepal that are jointly running the Province 2 government have been widening.

Till a month ago, the two Madhes-based parties were focusing all their efforts for party unification. With the Socialist Party and RJP-N forging separate alliances with Nepali Congress and Nepal Communist Party respectively for the recent National

Assembly election, the two parties seem to have been parting ways apart. The RJP-Nepal, which had been backing the KP Sharma Oli government since February 2018, suddenly turned hostile to the governing Nepal Communist Party in



When the communist party fielded Agni Sapkota for Speaker, RJP stood in support, which was seen as a precursor to the party's joining the government.

March last year after a district court handed a life term to its lawmaker Resham Chaudhary. The party withdrew its support to the government, saying the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) had failed to uphold a deal reached

between the two parties to keep Chaudhary out of jail. Chaudhary was convicted of masterminding the August 2015 Kailali violence, in which nine people were killed.

The party then started demanding constitutional amendments and the

withdrawal of “false cases” against its members. It was even planning to form an alliance with “like-minded forces”, including the Socialist Party, to launch protests for constitutional amendments. Talks were ongoing for a merger between the RJP-Nepal and Socialist Party Nepal, which together have 33 seats in the lower house—16 for the

Socialist Party—of the federal parliament. The RJP Party, however, had insisted that the Socialist Party quit government before a merger could take place. But in the third week of December, days before the Socialist Party quit the government, the Janata Party forged an electoral alliance with the Nepal Communist Party for the National Assembly election. When the communist party fielded Agni

Yadav rules out coalition in govt

Kathmandu: RJP- Nepal’s Coordinator and parliamentarian Mahendra Raya Yadav clarified that there was no immediate possibility of his party to join the present Nepal Communist Party-led government. At an interaction organized at Reporters’ Club in Kathmandu, Yadav further made clear that there was not any discussion held

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RJP and 17 for the

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India: Second largest remittance generating country

Kathmandu: More than half of all the remittance coming to Nepal is sent by the Nepali migrant workers in Gulf countries. The share of Gulf countries in the total remittance inflow to Nepal was 50.3 per cent in the first four months of the current fiscal year, according to Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB). The trend of remittance inflow showed that the national economy could be affected any time in case of a problem in the Gulf countries, said Dr. Gunakar Bhatta,



spokesperson at NRB. However, the ratio of remittance to GDP has been declining in the recent years, indicating that economic activities are increasing in the

country and job opportunities are being created, he said. Inflow of remittance from Malaysia, the major destination of Nepali migrant workers, has declined during the review

period as no Nepali migrant worker was allowed to fly to Malaysia during the last fiscal year, said Dr. Bhatta. The United States of America, Japan and South Korea are the major remittance sending nations after Gulf countries and Malaysia. India is the second largest remittance generating country for Nepal. Rs. 43.16 billion or 14.2 per cent of the total remittance was received from India

during the review period, he said. “We estimate that around 30 per cent remittance from India is received through informal channel,” he said. Last fiscal year, Nepal received Rs. 128.5 billion of remittance from India. Out of the total, 90.5 per cent was received from the formal channel and Rs. 38 billion from informal channel. Apart from India, Nepal received remittance of Rs. 750 billion from different countries in the last fiscal year.



Editorial

Sweet deal, bitter execution

There was a sweet deal to end the struggle of sugarcane farmers who have been unable to get their money of yields from the sugar mills for years. As per the five-point agreement reached between the agitating farmers and the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies (MoICS) on Friday, the sugar mills must clear all dues to the farmers by January 21. For this, the MoICS will act to enforce the accord that can be vital to minimise the long-running conflict between the sugarcane farmers and mill operators. The agreement has stipulated that the government will constitute a task force under a joint secretary of the ministry to recommend ways to iron out the problems of sugarcane farmers. The panel will also recommend to the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development and the Ministry of Finance to provide fertilisers, seeds and machines to the farmers so as to increase the production of sugarcane, and make sugar industries self-reliant and capable to export sugar. It will study about creating an automated system to fix sugarcane prices every year.

The government has also committed to coordinating with the line ministries to distribute money in subsidy to the farmers. The scale of injustice done to the sugarcane farmers is appalling. The sugar mill owners have not paid the farmers for years and they owe them millions of rupees. Shree Ram Sugar Mills owes Rs 420 million, Annapurna Sugar Rs 400 million, Indira Sugar Mills Rs 100 million, Lumbini Sugar Mills Rs 100 million, Mahalaxmi Sugar Mills Rs 200 million and Bagmati Sugar Mills Rs 110 million to the farmers, according to the recent report. The mill owners may forward various excuses for this but the main reason they have not paid is because they don't want to. Here is a simple logic. Sugarcane is

Sugarcane farmers have suffered a lot during their struggle for justice. They should not be made to suffer anymore.

a cash crop. Sugar is such a commodity that easily sells in the market and consumers immediately pay for it. So mill owners make hefty profit. To take in raw materials from poor farmers to run the industry on their blood and sweat, to make profits from their blood and sweat but not to pay them is a crime. Reports show that mill owners receive huge money from state coffers as subsidy. They even take in money allocated by the government exclusively for the farmers and it is the farmers whom they push to the state of suffering. Following the accord, the farmers have stopped their fortnight-long protest in Kathmandu. Farmers from central Terai had come to the capital and staged sit-in at Maitighar Mandala, with their 11-point demand. They had braved the chill and rain of the freezing winter.

They had lit a fire on the ground of the Maitighar to beat the cold. Ironically, the police had intervened in their agitation and put out the fire. But farmers have successfully drawn the attention of the state, media and civil society to their genuine grievance. The people from different walks of life including the rights organisations and students expressed their solidarity with the peasants' struggle. The increasing support for the agitation was perhaps one key factor that impelled the authorities to strike the agreement in favour of farmers. Sugar mill owners have made such pledges several times in the past but they have not kept them. Thus, we need to watch when this agreement will materialize and at the same time also pressure the government to abide by this pledge. We need to stand by sugarcane farmers, until justice is done to them. The government needs to send a clear message to the unscrupulous mill owners that they will be jailed if they do not pay to the farmers. Sugarcane farmers have suffered a lot during their struggle for justice. They should not be made to suffer anymore. The government should address all their concerns in such a way that they do not have to worry about not being paid by mill owners, ever again.

Is Xi Jinping a problem of China?

The Straits Times noted that use of the term "shows President Xi's firm grip on power despite a challenging past year."

On August 25, 2019, the official People's Daily newspaper ran a bold headline on the front page that included a term that caused observers to take notice. "The people's leader loves the people," the headline read. The reference in this case was to China's President Xi Jinping who continues to preside over the world's largest communist nation, with totalitarian characteristics. Notably, the term "people's leader" is a rare title of praise in China's political discourse. The people's leader loves the people, but do the people of China love him? That is the moot question. This phrase recalls the era of Mao Tse Tung and the personality cult that prevailed at that time. The re-emergence of the term is being rightly read by many as a further aggrandizement of the power of President Xi Jinping. While President Xi is already known as "core" leader, application of the title "people's leader" was apparently approved by the Communist Party of China's (CPC) secret annual conclave in Beidaihe in August 2019. More recently, the Straits Times noted that use of the term "shows President Xi's firm grip on power despite a challenging past year." There is little doubt that it has been a challenging year for China and in particular Xi Jinping. The trade war with the US and slowdown of the BRI are the external factors while the turmoil in Hong Kong and global concern over the treatment of Muslims in the re-education camps in Xinjiang were no less cause for concern within China. This lies at the very core of the new worry that China may not be able to meet all the targets it has set for itself in 2021, marking the centenary of the CPC. There is another factor which finds little discussion within China; this is China's all-weather friendship of Pakistan. It took some time for China to realise that while it is good to make Pakistan a client state, the appendage also comes at the cost of supporting global terrorists like Hafeez Saeed and Masood Azhar, much to China's own detriment. China's dogged defence of Masood Azhar prevented

him from being listed as a global terrorist, despite the best efforts of the West. The other challenge that has created an image problem for President Xi is Xinjiang. Since 2018, China has been bombarded by evidence of the re-education camps in which more than a million Uyghurs were interned. While initially there was blanket denial, gradually China woke up to the reality that in this day and age of technology, it is not possible to keep things hidden forever. In due course, came propaganda pictures, interviews and videos which outlined China's position, but did not and could not provide an image makeover based on the reality. In the long run, China will have to find a better way of handling its ethnic minorities particularly the Uyghur Muslims. This will depend as much on an end to repression and as also reducing all Uyghurs to extremists who are being trained in Pakistan and on the pay-roll of Pakistan Army's jihadi enterprise. While it is true that a few Uyghurs are involved in this enterprise and some did turn up in Syria to fight alongside the Islamic State, the blanket suspicion identifying all Uyghurs as extremists has rebounded on the Chinese state. At the end of December 2019, Hong Kong protesters held a rally in solidarity with China's Uyghur Muslims. Notably, the protesters in the rally linked China's surveillance and internment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang with China's efforts to tighten their grip over the Hong Kong Autonomous Region. While pro-Uyghur chants are common among protesters, the rally on December 22, 2019 was the first held in explicit support of the minority group. Many waved the blue flag of "East Turkestan," as Uyghur separatists call Xinjiang. The European Parliament had earlier called for the European Union (EU) to impose targeted sanctions against China over its treatment of Uyghurs. In October 2019, the EU also awarded a human rights prize to the jailed Uyghur intellectual Ilham Tohti. In December 2019, US lawmakers passed a bill calling for sanctions against senior Chinese officials over

the crackdown in Xinjiang. There is thus a perceptible shift in the manner in which the world views China and this gets echoed in its own small way within China. The intellectual centre-piece of the rising opposition within China can be traced to an essay by Xu Zhangrun, a law professor at the prestigious Tsinghua University and the Unirule Institute of Economics, a think tank in Beijing. Xu Zhangrun, first published an essay in late July 2019 on the Unirule webpage arguing that the CPC had progressively lost its reformist drive and spirit, which had resulted in the party now being in breach of the trust of the Chinese people. So much for Xi being a 'People's Leader'! Let us look at another example. On 1 August 2019, Professor Sun Wenguang, a retired Professor of Economics, was giving a live phone interview to the VoA radio show titled "Issues and Opinions", from his home in Jinan, in Shandong province, with regard to an open letter he had written criticising Chinese foreign aid and military intervention. Prof. Sun had argued that this was wrong because it happened at a time when Chinese domestic poverty was on the rise. In the middle of the interview, police broke down the apartment door and arrested him! The Chinese state clearly does not like dissent of any kind. The party's control over its cadres is absolute and the anti-corruption campaign has signalled that there is no room for dissent within the party. Laudable in its objectives, the campaign has led to a cleansing of cadres who disagree with President Xi. That is why one does not hear of dissent in political circles and only stray cases of dissenting voices emerge once in a while. That of course does not mean that there is no opposition to President Xi. It exists and thrives under the cover of the great wall. Perhaps the New Year 2020 will reveal a little more of the voices that speak up against Xi and his image as the new unifier of China! The problem of China is Xi Jinping and let it be known he is not going away anytime too soon.

Madhesi politics is now devoid of good direction

➤ *In the past, RJP and CPN were seen opposite sides but how do you analyze the increasing cooperation and similarity between them now?*

• There is only one line of Nepal's political parties - that is the chair, power or selfishness. So the events of the past few days have proven once again that all these parties are in the same stream. They may have different names, history, geography, but all have a vein of interest.

➤ *If so, they can compromise with anybody and any political parties for their interests?*

• Yes, that's what it looks like so far. This is the history of the multi-party system since Nepal came into being. For simplicity, they reproduce the principle. In their view, the principle is that no one can be a permanent enemy in politics, whoever they may be friends with. The fact is that Nepali politics has been reaffirmed as to what it can do for power.

➤ *Where is Madhesi politics going?*

• Madhesi politics is now devoid of direction. Madhesi parties have used slogans of UML-free campaigns in the past for power. Now it is closer with UML because the one, who was giving a loud slogan, called Oli of Madhesh. The election was won with the help of the one who was opposed, so no one has any honesty or moral strength.

➤ *What is the probability of alternate power coming to Madhes?*

• There is now a

vacuum in Madhesh. There is dissatisfaction among the youth in the parties which are taking over power. Many question marks have been raised among the general public. This shows the potential for a major storm in the future. The likelihood of a new leadership, the establishment of a new person and the displacement of the old from that storm has increased.

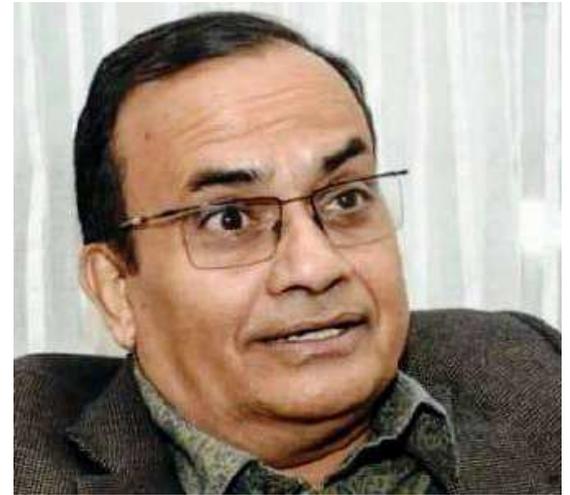
➤ *How do you see the discussion about the change of government in the Province 2, with the NCP and the RJP's alliance won in the National Assembly elections?*

• In the National Assembly elections, the candidates have won and the parties have lost. The parties no longer have moral strength. There are signs of a new power equation in the Province 2. RJP had written in support of the Speaker

• The mandate came in favor of the RJP and the Socialist Party in the Province 2. Both parties had jointly contested the election and won. At present, NCP is the largest party in Province 2 in terms of number. If these NCP and RJP have come together, then the Socialist Party will be fallen in the minority. In mathematical terms they can form a government.

➤ *What has been the reason behind the discussion between the RJP and the Socialist Party for unifications from a long time?*

• The discussion of unification between these two parties is just a drama. The alliance between the Socialist Party and the RJP in the Province 2 was compulsory and the people's pressure. However, they have different character, nature and principle. There is a great personal



Dr. Surendra Labh
Political Analyst

still no unity in the RJP, which was formed with unity of six parties, then how to could make unity with other parties. There are also three factions in Socialist Party.

➤ *What will be RJP's journey with NCP?*

• RJP's alliance with NCP is just for power because NCP is ruling party in center. Now RJP will gradually go to power and its leaders become ministers at the center. While in government, they also will talk about

amending the constitution like Upendra Yadav.

• There is a possibility of amending the constitution and other issues of Madhesh can be expected to be addressed. But for that there is need of honest initiation of Madhesi parties. But all of them have trapped in power. This is also the reason for the political upheaval in the general public.

➤ *Nepal has a powerful government in history, but there is no reward. What kind of government is needed in Nepal now when such majority government cannot function?*

• This is a big question mark. It is unfortunate that such a situation could not work. The biggest problem is facing the service delivery. It is also a matter of concern and analysis. The reality is that the way this government should have worked is not working. There is frustration in the general public.

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election. This has clearly shown that the power equation in the state is changing.

➤ *What effect will the mandate if the government of NCP and the RJP formed in the Province 2?*

• battle among them. They have not accepted existence of each other. Therefore, it cannot be believed that there will be unification between RJP and Socialist Party. The talk about unification between two parties is only a drama. There is

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Crisis...

Sapkota for Speaker, RJP stood in support, which was seen as a precursor to the party's joining the government. This has created a rift in the party.

The party's senior vice-chair, Sarbendra Nath Shukla said that some leaders in the six-member presidium had held meetings, at least three, with the ruling party leadership to decide on candidates for the National Assembly election. He did not rule out a deal that the leaders might have reached with the ruling party on joining the government. "A large number of party leaders are against joining the Oli government, largely because the prime minister has shown no signs of addressing our demands for constitutional amendments," Shukla told. Last week, five senior leaders from the RJP handed over a memorandum to party coordinator Mahendra Yadav,

accusing the six-member presidium of hobnobbing with the ruling party leadership in a bid to join the government.

"Mahendra Yadav has insisted that the party should not join the government unless the constitution is amended," said JP Yadav, the party general secretary.

Within the ruling party too, there are two distinct lines. Oli is in favour of inducting the RJP into government in a bid to ensure a two-thirds majority, which he lost after the Socialist Party quit. But Co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who has suddenly appeared stronger since extracting the Speaker post for the Maoist faction, is not too keen on bringing in the RJP.

Some leaders fear that by siding with the ruling party, they run the risk of their demands not getting

addressed. But others believe the party could finally make Oli address their demands. The bonhomie between the RJP Party and the ruling party has also started to cause concern in the Socialist Party.

The RJP Party and Socialist Party have a coalition government in Province 2, the only province where the Nepal Communist Party does not rule. All four candidates from the NCP-RJP alliance won from Province 2 in the National Assembly election on Thursday, a sign of the strengthening bond between the two parties. Rajendra Shrestha, co-chair of the Socialist Party, said that if the Janata Party decides to join the government, its leaders will lose face in the Madhes.

"Then, we will also have to think of their persistent calls for forming an alliance or unite as a face," Shrestha told.

Kwatra appointed as new envoy



Kathmandu: Vinay Mohan Kwatra has been appointed as the next Ambassador of India to Nepal, Ministry of External Affairs of India announced.

Kwatra, who is currently an Indian ambassador to France, is expected to take up his diplomatic assignment in Kathmandu shortly, the MEA stated on its official website. On January 14, India had proposed Kwatra as its new envoy to Nepal after Manjeev Singh Puri returned home completing his tenure.

Yadav rules...

within the party in this regard. He added, "There has been no any discussion about forming coalition with the incumbent government yet. Hence, there is no possibility for it. No talk on this has been held with the Prime Minister."

The coordinator, however, hinted at the possibility for the same if the government was going to address the past agenda and present demand the party raised. Furthermore, he assured of the unification process between RJP Nepal and Socialist Party for which, he said, process was forwarded.

Human Rights activist Dr Das honoured

Kathmandu: Human rights activist Dr Gauri Shankar Lal Das has been honoured. Minister for Labour, Employment and Social Security Rameshwor Raya Yadav handed him a letter of appreciation amid a programme organised by the Parshuram-Sakuntala Dahal Memorial Service Academy. The Academy was established by Prof. Ram Prasad Dahal, constitution expert Kashiraj Dahal and economist Keshab Dahal, all sons of Parshuram and Sakuntala, to honour the contribution of Parshuram and Sakuntala to social and religious sector in Bandipur, Siraha district. On the occasion, Kamala Basnet, who has topped in Masters' degree in English from Tribhuvan University, was also honoured. Basnet was a



product of a community school in Bandipur. Speaking at the event, Minister Yadav and the Academy's patron Prof. Dahal praised the Academy for contributing to social and religious sector in Siraha district.

Historian Prof. Dinesh Raj Panta emphasized the responsibility of

offspring to spread contribution and creation of their ancestors. Dr Das stressed the need for spreading feelings of kindness in the society. And constitution expert Dahal, also the Academy Chairperson, pointed out the need for valuing humanity and family's responsibility so as to strengthen social responsibility.

India cuts aid to Nepal by 33%



Kathmandu: India has drastically slashed its aid to Nepal for the upcoming fiscal year 2020/21. India has announced a budget cut of whopping 33 percent to Nepal from

the revised estimated aid to Nepal in the current fiscal year 2019/2020. Releasing the annual Union Budget for FY 2020/21 of India, Minister for Finance Nirmala Sitharaman reduced the budget for most of the aid-receiving countries besides a few exceptions. The foreign aid of India is disbursed through India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). The aid allocation for most of the countries has fallen compared to the allocated or revised estimation in the current fiscal year 2019/20. India

lowered the total aid allocation to various countries to IRs 69.07 billion from its revised estimate of IRs 75.83 billion in FY 2019/20. Nepal is going to receive IRs 8 billion (Rs 12.5 billion) in aid through the MEA in 2020/21, down by IRs 4 billion (Rs 6.4 billion) of the revised estimate of aid in the current fiscal year 2019/20, according to the annual budget of India. Even after the reduction of the aid, Nepal is going to be the third largest aid recipient among a dozen countries that directly benefit from the financial

assistance of India. With a total of IRs 28.85 billion in aid allocation, Bhutan remains the largest aid recipient from India. Mauritius takes Nepal's place as the second-largest aid recipient for 2020/21 with an allocation of IRs 10.25 billion. According to the revised estimate of aid allocation for the current fiscal year, Nepal is the second highest aid recipient from India. Meanwhile, India has increased its aid to Bangladesh by IRs 500 million and Myanmar by IRs 1.7 billion and Seychelles by 900 million.

Nepal, India to study feasibility of LP Gas pipeline

Kathmandu: Nepal and India have agreed to study the feasibility of liquefied natural gas pipeline stretching from Gorakhpur in India to Rupandehi in Nepal.

The government had proposed Indian authorities to build the Gorakhpur-Rupandehi natural gas pipeline during a recent Nepal-India joint working group (JWG) meeting held in New Delhi, where the Indian authorities had agreed to jointly study the feasibility of the project, informed Dhurba Ghimire, joint secretary at the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies (MoICS).

Citing that the demand for natural gas has been increasing in the recent years, Nepal had urged Indian government to construct a natural gas pipeline connecting the two countries, which will ensure effective supply of liquefied natural gas as per the domestic demand. "Indian authorities have taken our request to construct the



cross-border natural gas pipeline positively. Technical officials of both countries will soon begin the feasibility study of the planned Gorakhpur-Rupandehi natural gas pipeline project," said Ghimire.

As per him, Indian government has sought the commercial viability of the planned natural gas project and the details of the demand for liquefied natural gas (LNG) in Nepal. Moreover, he informed that Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) will submit necessary details

to the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) soon.

"Following this, the two sides will fix the modality of LNG pipeline project and its cost," added Ghimire.

MoICS officials are optimistic that Indian government will help Nepal build the planned natural gas pipeline project once Nepal assures Indian authorities that the country is a potential market for LNG. Among others, natural gas is instrumental to manufacturing chemical fertilisers in the country.

Built under the assistance from

India, South Asia's first cross-border oil project — Motihari-Amlekhgunj Pipeline Project — has already started commercial operation from September.

India has also agreed to extend the Motihari-Amlekhgunj oil pipeline to Chitwan after a study carried out by the IOC showed that it is feasible. Expansion of the oil pipeline project to Chitwan is expected to heavily reduce fuel transportation cost of NOC. The Motihari-Amlekhgunj pipeline project is expected to reduce fuel transport cost of NOC by more than Rs two billion annually.

Meanwhile, the Indian government is also positive towards constructing a cross-border liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) pipeline and bilateral discussions at different levels are being carried out to materialise the LPG pipeline project, as per Ghimire.

India presents annual budget budget for FY 2020-21

New Delhi: India's government offered relief to taxpayers and vowed to spend billions to double farmers' incomes and upgrade infrastructure, health care and industry to boost the country's lowest economic growth in a decade. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented to Parliament the budget for fiscal year 2020-21, which starts April 1, saying expenditures will total \$434.6 billion, up from \$385.6 billion in the current year. She said the government plans to spend \$39.8 billion for agriculture and allied activities, \$9.9 billion for health, \$3.9 billion for industry and commerce, and \$628.6 million to combat worsening air pollution in the country. Income tax will be lowered by 5-10% for people earning above 500,000 rupees (\$7,140) a year. Those those earning less than 500,000 rupees will pay no tax, up from 250,000 rupees currently, she said. The Press Trust of India news agency said the minister



cut short her speech in Parliament because she felt unwell after speaking for more than two hours, the longest budget speech by an Indian finance minister. Sitharaman had two pages left when she stopped after asking Speaker Om Birla to consider the remaining part of her speech as read, PTI said. She later recovered. Earlier, she said the fiscal deficit for the current year would widen to 3.8% of gross domestic product compared to the targeted 3.3%. She set the fiscal deficit at 3.5% for fiscal 2020-21. She also announced that the government

will reduce its stake in the government-run Life Insurance Corporation as part of its divestment program to raise resources. Last week it announced the selling of Air India. Sitharaman said 100 more airports will be developed in the country by 2024 to boost the aviation sector. She also announced an allocation of \$3 billion for the power and renewable energy sector in 2020-21. Loknendra Ranawat, an industrialist, said the budget allocations would create a better environment for industry and commerce.

India is facing its worst economic slowdown in a decade, with

economic growth this year slipping to 5%. The government projects the economy will grow by up to 6.5% in the next fiscal year and hopes to follow China's example in developing labor-intensive industries and exports. The upbeat assessment is at odds with the International Monetary Fund's decision earlier this month to downgrade its estimate for the country's 2019-20 economic growth to 4.8% from the 6.1% expansion it projected in October. The IMF cited a sharper-than-expected slowdown in local demand and stresses in the non-bank financial sector. Many economists believe Prime Minister Narendra Modi's signature economic policies are at least partly to blame for the slowdown. A surprise demonetization in 2016 and the hasty roll out of a goods and services tax were blows to manufacturing, especially the auto industry.

Insurance amount for girl child increases in Province 2

Janakpurdhham: The Province 2 government has decided to raise the insurance amount from its current Rs 100 thousand to Rs 300 thousand for the education of the girl child. In a press conference organized, Chief Minister of province-2 Lalbabu Raut informed about the hike. The province-2 had introduced the insurance scheme to encourage and empower girls under the flagship 'Beti Bachau Beti Padhau' (Save Girl Child, Educate Girl Child) campaign in mid-January last year. Furthermore, CM Raut informed that 4,373 girls under



18 years have been benefited from the scheme so far. The new decision also includes that the

insurance amount would be provided to the beneficiaries from the local units in lump sum

rather than the province government for which they ought to obtain the citizenship identity card and complete their education to certain level. He also said that request would be made to local units to consider further increasing the insurance amount up to Rs 600 thousand. Under the campaign, according to the CM, plans were afoot to provide scholarship to the girls from Dalit and Muslim communities in the State for their education from Grade 1 to Grade 8. It was also shared that more than 14,000 bicycles were distributed to girls under the campaign.

Girls in Tech' project launched in Province 2



Janakpurdhham: Chief Minister of Province 2, Lalbabu Raut, and Minister for Labor, Employment and Social Affairs, Rameshwar Ray Yadav, jointly inaugurated the 'Girls in Tech' project in Province-2. The project was launched under the Skill for Employment Program assisted by the UK Aid. It has aimed at educating and empowering girls in order to end gender discrimination.

Under the project, leadership training would be provided to the girls for boosting their confidence and competitiveness. The girls

being graduated would be the first beneficiaries of the project. Moreover, it helps to create environment for skilled human resources to get jobs in the companies. A total of 100 students from poor family would be provided the scholarships.

At the program in this regard, Chief Minister Raut said the province-2 government had a policy to make the Province a hub of technical education by producing required human resources. He expressed the view that the project would be useful to materialize the campaign of prosperous Province.

Temporary bridge over Lalbakaiya River



Rautahat: Locals in the southern and western parts of Rautahat have benefited after a temporary bridge was constructed over the Lalbakaiya River with the initiative of Ishanath Municipality.

The residents at Ishanath and Rajpur municipalities were compelled to walk 20 kilometres to reach the district headquarters Gaur. With the construction of the temporary bridge, locals can reach Gaur to get their works done on time. Earlier, the locals were compelled to spend hours

reaching the headquarters owing to lack of bridge. The municipality built the temporary bridge after installing hume pipes over the river.

According to the municipality office, the staffers along with Mayor Santosh Mehta had worked very hard after locals requested that the bridge be constructed. Mayor Mehta said the temporary bridge had come into operation within 15 days. He added that the bridge was completed at a cost of Rs 700,000.

Coronavirus: India steps up vigil at Indo-Nepal border

New Delhi: The center has stepped up vigil in districts bordering Nepal in view of a confirmed case of novel coronavirus detected there. The Union Health Ministry said health teams have been

deployed in areas along the border with Nepal at Panitanki in West Bengal and Jhulaghat and Jauljibi in Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh. "Subsequent to confirmed #coronavirus case in #Nepal,

vigil strengthened at Panitanki (West Bengal) entry point from Nepal," the Health Ministry said in a tweet on Monday. "In response to a confirmed case of #nCoV2019 in

#Nepal, India has stepped up vigil in districts bordering Nepal. Health Teams deployed at BOP with Nepal at Jhulaghat and Jauljibi, Dist Pithoragarh, #Uttarakhand," it had tweeted on Sunday.

Province 2 with highest number of leprosy patients

Kathmandu: Though Nepal had announced the elimination of leprosy at the national level on 19th January 2010, it still makes its presence in 17 districts. The state of elimination is understood when there is no more than a single case of leprosy among per 10,000 populations. The government aims to make the country totally free from leprosy by 2020. Jhapa, Morang, Udaypur, Bara, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Parsa, Rautahat, Sarlahi, Siraha, Banke, Bardiya, Kapilvastu, Nawalparasi West, Rupandehi, Kailali and Achham has the higher rate of leprosy cases than the elimination level. The data of the past nine years indicate that annually some 3,000 new leprosy cases are identified in the country,



according to the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division. Information about this was shared at an interaction programme organised on the occasion of the 67th World Leprosy Day

here today. Last fiscal year, a total of 3,282 new leprosy patients were identified in the country. The highest number 1,484 is in State 2 followed by 719 in State 5, 471 in State 1, 266 in Sudur Paschim, 165 in Bagmati, 89 in Karnali and 88 in Gandaki State.

Till the end of the last fiscal, 2,921 patients were under medical treatment, as said by Leprosy Control and Disability Management Section (under the Division)'s Officiating Chief Dr Uttam Ghimire. It is estimated that leprosy has so far caused disabilities on over 31,000 affected and the number of those undergoing a complete multi-drugs course is over 192 thousands. Leprosy is caused by mycobacterium leprae and it is one of the least communicable diseases. Ninety-five percent people have the resistant capacity against its bacteria which is transmitted from humans to humans. It is mainly transmitted by a respiratory route in case of a long association with the infected. It is totally curable, according to Dr Ghimire. Following one dose of multi-drugs course, 99 percent of its bacteria become significantly inactive.

There's no point in argument about MCC: Minister Banskota

Kathmandu: The government has clarified that Nepal could accept any financial assistance from any countries for the greater good of the country.

Indicating towards the controversies surrounding the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), the government has urged one and all not to distort the MCC issue and not to make it a political agenda.

Making public the decisions of the Council of Ministers held on January 27, Minister for Communications, Information and Technology Gokul Prasad Banskota said there was no point in decrying the MCC issue by concealing the facts.

The assistance to be received under the MCC would be utilized for the development of physical infrastructures such as upgradation of roads and for energy sector such as expansion of transmission lines in Nepal, Minister Banskota reminded, appealing one and all not to cast doubt on the intention of MCC. Furthermore, the Spokesperson of the



government hit out that there was no point in fussing about the MCC and saying it connected with the military activities.

China's 'One Belt and Road Initiative' and MCC do not have any strategic connection, he made it clear that MCC was purely linked to economic progress, road network, development of

energy and transportation. "We no longer engage in military activities of any countries. It is due to our compliance with the Non-Alignment Movement. However, there have been instances wherein we had received support from various countries during cold war-era," the Minister added. Arguing that the economic prosperity would be attained by harnessing human

capabilities and mobilizing resources and technologies, he viewed that generating discourses intending to prevent further foreign aid for the development in energy sector in the wake of signing of energy trade agreement between Nepal and India was nothing more than an attempt to stall development, prosperity and positive changes in the guise of nationality. "There will be our investment in MCC. We are investing approximately Rs 15 billion in it and theirs (US) is approximately Rs 55 billion. When it comes to endorsing it from the Federal Parliament of Nepal, the US Parliament has passed it and it has come into operation in 49 countries," he said. The Spokesperson admitted that Nepal had agreed to some conditions placed when receiving loans from some countries, referring to donor agencies like World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Exim Bank of China, Exim Bank of India while receiving development grants but not undermining the national interest of the country.

Government will serve full term: CM Raut



Janakpurdhham: Province 2 Chief Minister Lalbabu Raut said there wouldn't be any change in the provincial Cabinet. "There are a few anti-federalism elements, who have been spreading rumours about Cabinet reshuffle. I want to assure everyone that there won't be any change in the Cabinet or the government formed as per the people's mandate," said the chief minister, speaking at the first

anniversary of Nepal Engineers Association Province-2. "Sometimes you hear rumours about a change in the chief ministerial post and sometimes rumours are in the air about a possible change of ministers, but let me clarify there won't be any change in the Cabinet, and the same Cabinet and ministers will last their full five year's tenure," he added. The chief minister, however, admitted that the government had failed to live up to the expectation of the people. CM Raut assured that the government would soon make payment of 860 million rupees for development projects completed in the last fiscal. "It's true that the amount has not been cleared so far, but it will happen soon, by formulating necessary act and regulation," he said.

Charge d' Affaires of Indian Embassy pays courtesy call on Speaker Sapkota



Kathmandu: Charge d' Affaires of the Embassy of India Dr Ajay Kumar on Wednesday paid a courtesy call on newly-appointed Speaker Agni Prasad Sapkota. During the meeting, issues related to Nepal-India relations were discussed. On the occasion, Dr Kumar congratulated Speaker Sapkota for being elected to the Speaker of the House of Representatives. He also wished

Sapkota for his successful tenure. This is the first time that Dr Kumar met with Speaker Sapkota after the latter assumed his office on Monday. Sapkota was elected the Speaker of the House of Representatives unopposed on Sunday. Meanwhile, Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Hou Yanqi had paid a courtesy call on Speaker Sapkota on Monday.

Dimple Jha's resignation: A sign of new govt in Province 2



Kathmandu: Province 2 State Minister for Physical Infrastructure Dimple Kumari Jha resigned from her post on Tuesday expressing discontent over the working style of the provincial government. However, theories have suggested otherwise—the rise of a new political equation in the Madhesh amid rumors that Rastriya Janata Party Nepal and ruling Nepal Communist Party are in play to bring changes in the provincial government. Following the victory of the RJPN-Federal Socialist Forum Nepal (now Samajbadi after merging with Dr. Baburam Bhattarai-led Naya Shakti) led by Upendra Yadav in the 2017 Elections, the two regional parties formed a coalition government in the Province 2. The Province

Assembly is currently headed by Samajbadi's Lal Babu Raut. RJPN member Dimple Jha was elected as a member of Province 2 under proportional representation electoral system and is the spouse of RJPN presidium member Anil Jha, who is one of those in favor of quitting Yadav coalition. After months-long effort to convince Yadav for merger made no headway, the RJPN turned its face to the ruling NCP and reached a significant two-point agreement ahead of the National Assembly Election. The electoral alliance in Province 2 rewarded it two seats in the upper house, and the RJPN now looks forward to forming a coalition with the largest party. RJPN has publicly stated that they have no intention to oust Samajbadi in Province 2 but also hinted at a possible coalition with the NCP-led government if their demands of the constitution amendment, the release of their leaders and dropping of the criminal charges put against them would be addressed. If the RJPN and NCP ally, they will have an absolute majority to form a new government in Province 2. If it happens, RJPN will get the Chief Minister.

Harsh Vardhan Shringla takes charge as new foreign secretary

New Delhi: Seasoned diplomat Harsh Vardhan Shringla, who last served as India's envoy to the U.S., took charge as the new foreign secretary on Wednesday for a fixed two-year term, succeeding Vijay Gokhale.

The major development comes at a time when India is facing a plethora of foreign policy challenges, including ramping up of diplomatic outreach in the wake of criticism by some countries and global institutions of the new citizenship law. India is also facing an increasingly assertive Trump administration and China's attempt to expand its military and economic influence in the region. Speaking to reporters ahead of taking the charge, Shringla, a 1984-batch officer of the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), said he is very clear about the fact that foreign service is a public service and its every effort should be dedicated to contributing towards the nation in the form of its



security and prosperity through external engagements. "I am as committed to the ministry's role in nation-building as I was almost 36 years ago when I entered these portals as a young professional. I look forward to functioning under the guidance of the Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) and the External Affairs Minister (S. Jaishankar), our political leadership and with the support and cooperation of my colleagues both within the ministry and outside," the 57-year-old diplomat said.