

31st Sapru House Lecture

by



Hon'ble Mr Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda'
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on

*“Recent Developments in Nepal and Advancing Nepal-India
Relations”*

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**Chairman of the programme,
Dignitaries,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:**

It is indeed a great honour for me to be invited to speak before this distinguished audience at the 31st Sapru House Lecture. This is my second time to be a part of this prestigious lecture series and I sincerely thank the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) for this opportunity and the warm reception.

Your invitation to speak on recent developments in Nepal and Nepal-India relations testifies in itself the amount of interest you have in Nepal's affairs. We take it as your expression of goodwill towards a stable and prosperous Nepal.

Distinguished Guests,

When I entered this dignified chamber five years ago for the 3rd Sapru House Lecture, it was completely a different context in Nepal.

Back then, we were in the peak of a long and painful political transition. We were toward the end of the term of the first Constituent Assembly, which was formed, with so much of excitement and expectation, to write, for the first time in Nepal's history, people's constitution through elected assembly. But, the Constituent Assembly was then making little headway on critical agendas of constitution making.

In a diverse society like ours, where political forces carry contesting ideologies, managing transition was not easy. Neither was it easy to achieve the kind of political transformation we aspired for. At times it seemed that the transition would never end and people's agendas that we fought so hard for would never be materialized.

Nevertheless, as I stand before you today, it is a different mood in Nepal. Back then, sense of uncertainty surrounded us; today a sense of robust optimism.

Optimism spawned by the accomplishment of a historic political process that was once thought unreachable!

Optimism generated by the conviction that fundamental transformation is possible!

Optimism driven by the sense of clarity about the destiny and confidence to reach there!

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I carry before you the same optimism that best describes the sentiment of Nepal and Nepali people today.

As a leader of a decade-long armed revolution and then the peace process, I have seen ups and downs; and ebb and flow of a long journey.

The armed struggle I led was the struggle against backwardness and injustice; against clutches of feudalism in all its forms and manifestations; and against discrimination and despotism. It was a struggle to awaken, enlighten and empower people.

And the historic peace process was a course to institutionalize the agendas that people aspired for; process to found the kind of polity that would serve people best; a process to translate people's enlightened idea of desired socio-political arrangement into a set of governing documents. The process was never easy and it took time.

Dear Friends,

What Nepal did in the past few years has been a transformation of historic proportion. It rarely happened elsewhere in the world that a traditional force and an armed revolutionary force come to negotiation table, set the common future agenda of socio-political restructuring, accomplish the journey from bullet to ballot and the entire process culminate in the making of the constitution by people's elected representative, incorporating the uniquely possessive agendas for an inclusive society. As all of you are well aware that the process of peace and democratic transformation was initiated from 12 points understanding between the then 7 parliamentary parties and CPN (Maoist)

Today, we have successfully completed the very sensitive and delicate part of the peace process, which is the management of ex-combatants and arms and ammunition.

Today, we have the constitution that embodies hopes and desires of 28 million Nepali people -- the constitution that we look upon as the best possible outcome of compromise accommodating diverse and often contesting aspirations.

It is the Constitution that guarantees human rights and fundamental freedoms to all citizens without any discrimination. It incorporates most of the rights and freedoms contained in the international human rights instruments. The Constitution that has been appreciated by our friends around the world as uniquely progressive and forward-looking!

Social justice was on top of agenda of the people's struggle my party led in the past and today, the pillar of social justice is thus firmly set up in the Constitution. It seeks to promote socio-economic justice to the backward and different ethnic communities of the country.

State policies are aimed to uplift and empower socially backward women, *Dalits, Adibasi Janajatis, Madhesis, Tharus*, minorities, persons with disability, backward classes, sexual minorities, youths, peasants, workers, and citizens from backward regions and economically poor background.

As a unique measure of social justice, the Constitution has spelled out ways to ensure gender equality. It provides that the president and vice-president should come from different community and gender. Similar provision applies in the election of Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the House of Representative as well as Chair and Vice Chair of the National Assembly. One third representation of women in the federal parliament and provincial assemblies, and forty percent in elected local bodies has been guaranteed.

Journey from an armed struggle to a successful constitution making was not easy by any means. We faced many hurdles and had to come through odds of all kinds. With untiring resolve, we marched ahead. It was a resolve to transform society; a resolve to do away with injustice and backwardness; and a resolve to see better days in people's life. It is quite clear that in accomplishing this historic change, we received valuable support from India and friends and well-wishers around the world.

Distinguished audience,

Formation of pre-election left alliance and post-election merger of the two largest communist forces in Nepal has been yet another transformative course in Nepal's political development. A unified, progressive Left force was a long-held desire of our people. Majority of them used to vote for the Left parties but it was divided votes as long as Left parties were not one.

Having accomplished a political process and having established people's agendas through people's constitution, we, as progressive political forces, faced one more challenge. A huge challenge of preserving the gains; a challenge of translating the constitutional aspirations into concrete deliverable on the ground and in people's daily life! Divided we could not do this. United we can. This very imperative strongly drove the Left parties to form an election alliance under one manifesto first, and then, the merger.

It was a bold decision and the consequence was rewarding – for the Left parties and for the stability and better governance of the country.

In the provincial and federal elections, the Left Alliance (and now the Nepal Communist Party) received a resounding mandate of the people of Nepal. Today Nepal Communist Party not only has a robust government at the Centre but also in 6 of the 7 newly formed provinces. In vote share count, NCP tops 74 of the 77 districts of Nepal, including 17 of the 20 Terai-Madhes districts.

We are fully convinced that the Left victory is the result of people's trust on us.

Trust that we would provide the country a strong and stable government;

Trust that stable government would instead provide an enabling environment to carry forth the country's pressing development works;

Trust that we are competent and committed to root out the evils of corruption and poor governance that held up the country's development;

Trust that our leadership can effectively carry forth national agenda, protect the national interests and enhance the dignity of the nation.

And on our part, we are committed that we will not let our people down. We will not let their trust dissipate.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Political process over, what remains now for Nepal is the economic transformation. Political gains cannot sustain in the absence of economic transformation.

Achieving economic transformation is going to be an uphill task. Even today our society is mostly agrarian and agriculture is largely subsistence-based direly needing land pooling, commercialization of agriculture and investment in better inputs and technology.

Growth and prosperity is impossible without massive industrialization that requires competence, capacity and entrepreneurial orientation of private sector, not merely rent seeking tendency. Nepal's private sector is still in nascent phase requiring empowerment. To reach our growth target, domestic resources are far from enough. We are focused on acquiring more and more of foreign investment as well.

Infrastructure is not only the measure of country's prosperity level but also the foundation that propels growth of overall economy and help diversify economic activities. Without seamless road connectivity, industrialization is impossible. A number of villages

in Nepal are yet to see a decent, blacktopped road and the top task before us is to end this situation.

Both our countries relish today the treasure of demographic dividend. From development perspective, this is a rare opportunity. What our youths need is the quality education that empowers them with the sort of skills required to shoulder and sustain country's development process. Likewise, we need research and innovation centres.

Key to all these sectoral transformation is the issue of governance, which is yet to be improved in our countries. To transform governance, we are advancing legal and intuitional reform in Nepal. We are equally aware that governance reform is possible only when those of us in society's driving seat lead by example.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Journey to prosperity for us is not a lone venture. We see our prosperity closely tied with the prosperity of our big neighbours and with the kind of partnership we are able to forge with them.

As a close neighbour, we are delighted to see India's rapid march on the path of development and its rising global stature.

Be it the massive scale of infrastructure build-up or the development of industrial corridor;

Be it the world class advancement in information and communication engineering or the launching of satellites,

And above all, the almost seven decades of uninterrupted democratic practice and successful consolidation of democratic institutions in the undoubtedly the world's largest democracy!

India's multidimensional progress has not only inspired us but also provided us solid lesson that things are doable.

Dear Friends,

Ours is a civilizational bond formed even before our two societies were born as modern nation states with current defined boundary. We have jointly inherited the treasures of tradition; affluence of ancient knowledge; and even today, shared culture and lore, myths and mythology, art and architecture, literature and lifestyles that have become the distinct hallmark of our relations.

Today, India is cruising on its development journey with the slogan of '*Sabkaa saath sabkaa bikaas*' while Nepal's development vision is captured in '*Samriddha Nepal Sukhi Nepali*'. Both are the transformative visions for inclusive and sustained development process that seeks not to leave anyone behind.

As a milestone of the journey towards prosperous Nepal, we seek to graduate from LDC status at an early date and acquire a middle-income country status by 2030, which is the deadline for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals.

Beyond the respective border, our two countries do share a dream of regional prosperity and better regional cooperation. Just a week ago, the 4th Summit of the BIMSTEC Heads of State and Government successfully concluded in Kathmandu. The leaders' declaration has well-articulated the region's aspiration for peaceful, prosperous and sustainable Bay of Bengal region and several key decisions have been made in this direction, including on enhancing regional connectivity.

As the current Chair of another important regional process, namely SAARC, Nepal's desire is to revive it and see a conducive environment for early convening of the stalled summit. We believe that SAARC and BIMSTEC do not substitute but complement each other.

Beyond the region and on global front, both India and Nepal are part of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved by 2030. We are both advocates in international forums of the issues uniquely faced by developing countries and do raise voice for a fairer and more inclusive global development architecture. We speak for a better level playing field for all countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You may ask: have our relations always been smooth and trouble-free? Of course not. We have seen difficult times too. In retrospect, we can easily say that the difficult times could have been avoided had we seen things in more enlightened perspective and judged things better.

Nonetheless, good thing is that even in difficult times, we remained engaged and remained sincerely effortful to free ourselves from those intermittent irritants. We did not let such irritants undermine the strong foundation of our relations. Now, we need to look forward. And in doing do, we must ensure that mistakes of the past are not repeated.

We have to acknowledge that relationship between neighbours is of unique nature and that mutual trust, understanding and respect for each other's sensitivities and concerns

contribute to strengthen the foundation of such relationship. Respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in internal affairs help buttress trust which is absolutely essential to govern a friendly relationship. Let me tell you frankly: small neighbours have some sensitivities that need to be understood and respected.

With India, our development partnership is substantial. And we are committed to deepen this partnership further. After decades, we have been able to form a strong government with robust mandate and we see this as an excellent opportunity.

Lately, following the guidance from the highest political leadership, both our countries are focused on timely implementation of bilateral agreements and undertakings. We have already started to see positive results on the ground. I am happy to note that Prime Minister Modi visited Nepal four times in as many years. This will be remembered as a historic development in the annals of Nepal-India relations.

Cross border infrastructure has justifiably received top priority in our bilateral development engagement. Soon, we are going to see the operation of cross border railway. Cross border integrated check posts are being developed at key border points to facilitate and smoothen trade, transit and movement of people. Roads linking our respective highways with main border points are being upgraded. Bottlenecks still exist at some of these points, which we need to attend to in a prompt manner.

Given Nepal's potential and India's massive need, management of water and hydropower is a key area of our cooperation. A couple of big projects are already under implementation, the success of which will set fascinating precedence for more such projects.

Specific sectors aside, we are also assessing the overall picture of Nepal-India relations in its totality too. Both sides have appreciated the need to update and upgrade these relations in tune with the realities of the 21st century and to this end, we have jointly assigned the Eminent Persons' Group to provide us useful recommendations. The Group will hopefully submit its report soon. Our relations must scale new heights of mutual satisfaction.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I said earlier, Nepal-India relations are not only built on the shared attributes of long history of co-existence as close neighbours but also driven by the fact that our destinies are interlinked.

Our relations are not confined to government level alone. We have a much broader spectrum of people-to-people contacts that provide a solid foundation to our relations. Our relations are both deep and extensive.

We have similar aspirations and face identical challenges in pursuit of respective development goals. We are both democracies and hence, at times our processes look slow, messy as well as full of noise. Working with multiple stakeholders is naturally time consuming. However, the end result of this process is likely to be more self-sustaining.

Both Nepal and India are highly diverse societies and both of us face challenges of managing this diversity. We can learn from how each of us tackle these challenges and in the meantime, learn to be appreciative of each other's efforts.

Despite progress, poverty is still massive in our countries. In villages, hundreds of thousands of households are still deprived of basic public goods while our cities still have slums at every nook and corner.

How long will it take for us to ensure that our people have a decent home, decent clothes and quality food with adequate nutritional content? How long will it take for us to ensure that our youths receive world-class education that makes them competent and competitive? These and similar are indeed pressing questions that stare both our countries and these tell us why growth and development should be deemed more crucial than any other consideration.

Dear Friends,

This is why we have been saying that we want a robust economic partnership with India.

A partnership that enables both our countries to grow together;

A partnership that helps our youths to secure decent job opportunities at home;

A partnership that helps overcome Nepal's structural bottlenecks as landlocked and least developed country;

A partnership that fosters mutually-rewarding and beneficial trade relationship;

A partnership that fosters the process of industrialization, flow of investment, transfer of technology and technical knowhow and connects our economies in value chain;

A partnership that leads to better utilization of natural resources, including our vast hydro resources for our mutual benefits;

A partnership that that leads to seamless cross border infrastructure of all kinds;

A partnership that connects our peoples through tourism and builds on our cultural treasures!

That means such a partnership will have a strong economic dimension. It will be fully appreciative of all those positive attributes of centuries-old civilization component of our relations. And in the meantime, it will stand on the solid foundation of the fundamental principles of interstate relations, namely, equality, mutual respect, mutual benefit and non-interference.

I am convinced that a peaceful, stable, prosperous and democratic Nepal is and will be in the interest of our neighbours, region and beyond.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to conclude with these words. I thank you once again for this privilege.

