

## Interview with Mr. Deepak Bohra

Hon'ble Minister, Ministry of Forest & Soil Conservation, Government of Nepal



Mr. Deepak Bohra granted an interview to Mr. Jeewan P. Thanju, Editor-in-Chief of HYDRO Nepal. Excerpts from the interview:

**As the Minister for Forest and Soil Conservation of Nepal, how do you assess the overall scenario of Nepal with regards to climate change and green house gas emissions?**

In general, Nepal is not a major contributor to climate change and green house gas emissions. However, we are one of the most vulnerable countries in terms of its impact. Therefore, we are seriously concerned regarding the climate change issues and the global debate on the climate change.

**As you are well aware about the fact that the Himalayan range is one of the three major spots, other two are the Amazonian rain forest and the Polar ice caps, on this planet that is going through climate change that has far reaching global consequences. In this background, how do you perceive the roles of Nepal to check or mitigate the effects of the climate change?**

In the global climate change debate, people are talking a lot about Amazonian Rain Forests and the Polar Ice Caps. Whenever people talk about snow melting, they relate this to Polar Bear. On the other hand, the glaciers are receding faster and snows are melting in the Himalayas. Surprisingly, the issue of the Melting Himalayas is not yet a global concern. Nobody is talking about our Snow Leopard in the Himalayas. Melting Himalayas have far reaching consequences which global community should know. More importantly, we are not the cause of these Melting Himalayas although we are most vulnerable to it. As I mentioned, we are not the cause, so mitigation is not our key concern. Our concern is adaptation. The developed and GHG emitters should work together to mitigate it. Having said that our long standing efforts to conserve forest resources through protected area management and community forests are sequestering substantial amount of CO<sub>2</sub> there by reducing in GHG.

**The GON has successfully hold its cabinet meeting on 4th Dec, 2009 near the Mt. Everest Base camp at the lap of the majestic peak and was indeed successful in attracting the global attention on the issue of climate change. Climate Change is the biggest challenge ever faced by humanity. Would you like to elaborate the expected outcome of the Cop 15 in mitigating the issues of climate change?**

The Cabinet Meeting at Kalapatthar (5542 m) at the Everest Base Camp was a historic event. Yes, it attracted global attention on the impact of climate change in Himalayas. Each and every newspapers and news channels all over the world

published the news with a great importance. That means the issue of Melting Himalayas due to climate change spread all over the world. This historic event made heads of the country delegates and climate change negotiators from these countries to rethink about the Himalayas when they talked about polar region and small island developing states. I am very confident that in the next COP15 mountain issues will be in the agenda.

**Nepal is rich in its natural and cultural biodiversity and water resources and the development of the nation is largely depends on the judicious exploitation of these resources. In this context, are you satisfied, as the Minister for Forest and Soil Conservation, what the nation has achieved so far and is delivering its efforts in harnessing the available natural resources including the water resources?**

I do agree with you that Nepal is rich in its natural and cultural resources including water resources. However, we have not yet been able to fully utilise it. Systematic and planned intervention to harness these resources has not yet happened. Utilising either water resources or any other natural resources must be approached from the concept of sustainability. I do believe that Nepal could really take a leap in development by developing hydro power. I raised this issue of hydro-power in a side event organised by UNEP during the COP15 in Copenhagen.

**As you may agree that the development of Nepal's immense water resources and the huge hydroelectric power potential holds the key to overall development of Nepal. However, despite these potential, country remain underdeveloped and poor. What is your observation in this regards?**

The dilemma of being a rich country in terms of natural resources and poor in terms of economic development is always there in our case. I fully agree with you that we must focus on using the immense water resources to generate hydroelectricity power. This will only lead Nepal to a path of economic development. How long we can stay in 13 hours of load shedding in a country which has immense water resources to generate hydroelectricity power. Look at the impact of this in all the industries through out the country. If we can generate substantial hydroelectricity power, we could go more 'green' in terms of climate change. Hydroelectricity not only help us to develop economy but also mitigate green house gas.

**Most of the hydropower sites are located in the forest/conservation areas and getting clearances from the**

**forest department and ministry is lengthy and not hydropower friendly as this is the case faced by the IPPs and NEA. And getting consent from the ministry even to initiate the feasibility and environment study of the projects is even more disappointing. As the minister of MoFSC, what is your opinion and future plan in resolving these pertinent issues faced by the hydropower developers?**

All of us should be aware that our conservation efforts do not obstruct the priority of the national development projects including hydropower. Instead, our conservation initiatives help to sustain these projects. Obviously, most of the important rivers with high potential for the hydropower sites are located in the forest and conservation areas as they are part of the ecological system. We have a culture of looking the whole ecosystem in a fragmented way and make the planning process complicated. When we plan to develop hydropower, our concern is to be sensitive to environment around the site. This is where we do need a detail EIA which many of us consider complicated. I will be very happy to discuss on the issue of 'lengthy' process to make short without compromising our environmental concerns. The environmental concerns we are expressing are for the present as well as for the future generation to come. Effective EIA even helps to make the project sustainable.

**It is apparent that there is lack of coordination between and among the various ministries of GoN on the development agendas of water resources and hydropower. While the Ministry of Energy (MoE) announces the priority for hydropower development, the MoFSC makes more stringent rules not only discouraging the developers but also contradicting with the vision of MoEn and the GoN. What are your comments and what initiatives you are taking to avoid these hurdles.?**

Please note that MoFSC is part of the Government of Nepal. How could our policy contradict with GoN. As I mentioned earlier, it is much to do with clear understanding of the nature and natural system. The concern of MoFSC is to minimize the environmental impact during the development of the hydropower. How could you support to destroy watershed areas which help to generate water. I would like to request all the hydropower companies to look the river and surrounding system as a part of integral ecological system. MoFSC do not discourage any development process but request to follow a system to come up with a win-win situation. I am happy to facilitate to develop a transparent process.

**While there will be the impact of climate change on hydropower development. Where as the development of hydropower can also be seen as the mitigating factor to check the climate change as well. In this context, now is the time to act for Nepal in mitigating the effect of climate change through the development**

**of hydropower. What is your opinion in this regards? Do you have any plan to mitigate the risk and special programme to promote hydropower?.**

I do agree with you that if we do not care, the hydropower is one of the most vulnerable sectors of the climate change impact. If there is a GLOF in Manang, what will happen to Marshyangdi Hydropower. This is the point we are raising in the MoFSC. We must respect nature and environment to reduce the vulnerability of the hydropower. On the other hnd, hydropower can substantially contribute to climate change mitigation. In fact, I am promoting this at the global climate change debate including in the COP15 Copenhagen. We have a huge hydroelectricity power potential which is a 'green energy'. The surplus power from us can be sold to India not just as power but also to reduce carbon footprint of India. However, the overall development should follow a system where we achieve win-win situation. We should not always look for a fast track by compromising with our future.

**Buffer zone of the National Parks has very stringent rules to discourage even a small hydropower development. Hydropower can alleviate poverty of the people living in the Buffer zone. In this context, what is your opinion to relax various hurdles, so that the benefits can be reaped also by the local people?**

I do not agree with you that Buffer zone of National Parks has very stringent rules to discourage even a small hydropower. In buffer zone and in conservation areas, we are promoting hydropower as an alternative to fuelwood. If I am correct, conservation areas such as ACAP are one of the key promoters of hydropower in the rural areas to substitute fuel wood and improve the livelihood. I think the issue is that we find difficult to follow the rule and system. If this is the case, we should try to find out where the main hurdles to follow the rule and system.

**The GoN has recently announced Gaurishanker Conservation area and extension (doubling the area) of the Bardia National Park. In our opinion if the catchment areas of the proposed large multipurpose projects such as Karnali Dam, Upper Seti were made conservation area, it would have improved the life of these projects. What is the scientific or environmental basis of these announcements?**

Both Gaurishanker and proposed Banke National Park are some of the globally important biological hotspots. This is our moral responsibility to protect such globally important areas. Regarding the proposed Banke National Park, please be ensured that the declaration will not hamper any major development initiatives.

**Upper Tamakoshi Hydropower Project (456MW) is a project of national importance not only it generates cheapest electricity but, also it is being implemented**



with local financing. The project lies within the recent announced Gaurishanker Conservation Area. What is your opinion on the implications on the project due to this announcement?

As I mentioned above, Gaurishanker area is one of the most important sites for high mountain biodiversity in Nepal. This is already part of the Sacred Himalayan Landscape. The Gaurishanker area has tremendous economic opportunities such as ecotourism development, medicinal plants besides hydropower potential. I have repeatedly mentioned that these conservation efforts will not hamper the national priority development projects. Look at ACAP. Are there any problems with Upper Modi or Upper Marshyangdi projects? I would again like to emphasize here that people are hesitate to follow the rules and system. How do you underestimate ecological system, when we are developing hydropower from these natural

resources? All of us do need to understand that conservation is important for even sustaining any development projects.


**Would you like to convey any message to the readers and the hydropower enthusiasts of the Nepal?**

Globally, at present, people are talking about environmental issues such as climate change. We are also raising the issue of Melting Himalayas. Environment conservation is for us and for our future generation. Environment conservation is not a luxury but need of present decade. People all over the world are getting more conscious about the environmental issues. We the people from Nepal should work to conserve our nature and environment. Environment conservation does not mean that we do not go for development. The only point is, development and environment conservation must be taken side by side. ♦

## Workshop on Water Resource Management on Federalism in Nepal


Center for Constitutional Dialogue and Media for Energy Nepal (P) Ltd. jointly organized a Workshop on above topic on January 7, 2010. As the nation is moving toward the federalism, the debate on water resources management was long overdue. Dr. Govinda Raj Bhatta, former Secretary, (Water Resources Specialist) delivered









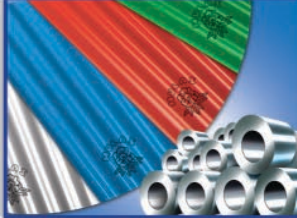
a paper on the subject. The commentators were Mr. Som Nath Poudel, former Secretary, (Water Resources Specialist) and Mr. Tika Ram Bhattarai (Legal Expert). The Chief Guest of the workshop was Mrs. Purna Kumari Subedi, Vice Chairperson of Constitutional Assembly of Nepal. The main theme of the paper was that if we must go for a federal system, it should be on the basis of the river basin concept that integrates people on a series of north-south axes.



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