

A conference on
The Role of NGOs/INGOs in Developing Madhesh
 Organised by: Non-Resident Madheshis Association
 Chair: Dr. C. K. Raut

14-15 November 2011, Monday & Tuesday
 Centre for Constitutional Dialogue (CCD), Alpha Beta Complex
 Buddhanagar, Kathmandu, Nepal

WELCOME SPEECH

Dr. C. K. Raut

Mr. Chairman of the ceremony, the Honourable Dan Bahadur Chaudhary,
 Minister for Women, Children and Social Welfare;

His Excellency Robert Piper,
 UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Nepal;

His Excellency Dr. Alexander Spachis,
 the Ambassador to the EU Delegation to Nepal;

His Excellency John Tucknott,
 the UK Ambassador to Nepal;

Shri Jaideep Mazumdar,
 Deputy Chief of Mission,
 Embassy of India;

Mr. Rajib Upadhya,
 Sr. External Affairs Specialist from World Bank,

honourable guests, dignitaries, ladies and gentlemen,

As a general chair of the conference and the president of the Non-Resident Madheshis Association, it is my great pleasure to welcome all of you, to the conference on the Role of NGOs/INGOs in Developing Madhesh, organised by the Non-Resident Madheshis Association. This conference itself is very much the first of its kind, and is being organised at the crucial moment of the history of Nepal.

I would like to begin this conference by briefly defining the words in its title -- The Role of NGOs/INGOs in Developing Madhesh, and then reviewing the objective of the conference.

First, let's look at the word 'Madhesh'. Madhesh is a morphological derivative of 'Madhyadesh', meaning the middle country, and its history is as old as human civilization on the Indian Subcontinent. The boundary of Madhesh is precisely defined in ancient texts. For example, Manusmriti defines Madhyadesh as

हिमवद्विन्ध्ययोर्मध्ये यत्प्राग्विनशनादपि ।
प्रत्यगेव प्रयागाच्च मध्यदेशः प्रकीर्तितः ॥

i.e. the plain land between Himalaya and Vindhya mountains and to the east of the river Vinasana and to the west of Prayag is defined as Madhyadesh.

According to the Vedic Civilization, the first significant king of Madhyadesh is said to be Ikshyaku or Okkāka, the son of Vaivasvata Manu and grandson of Vivaswan. Thirty-four dynasties after him, we have much celebrated generation of Ram, and Sita, the daughter of King Janak whose capital is said to be at the current town of Janakpur in Nepal.

Not only Sita, Madhesh is also the birth place of Buddha, and the Buddhist Canon like Vinay Pitak, too, gives the precise boundaries of Madhyadesh, also known as Majjimdesh in Pali, which extends 400 miles further to the east than the Manu's time. So it used to be a vast land, and once it included 14 out of 16 Mahajanpadas on the subcontinent.

Madhesh was ruled by several great dynasties in ancient and medieval times, from Emperor Ashoka to King Salhesh, and finally came under the control of Muslim Rulers and British. At the later stage of the British Raj in India, Madhesh was ruled by Sen Kings mostly as suzerainty states. These kings paid taxes to Nawabs and the East India Company.

The part of Madhesh present today in Nepal is a result of the memorandum of 1816 and the treaty of 1860 with the East India Company. Through the memorandum of 8th December 1816, the East India Company handed the eastern part of Madhesh, between Koshi and Rapti rivers, to Nepal, instead of paying two hundred thousands rupees per year. The western part of Madhesh between Rapti and Mahakali rivers came through the treaty of 1860, as a reward to Gurkhas, for their support to the East India Company, in suppressing the Sepoy Mutiny in India, in the late 1850s.

This is how the current part of Madhesh came into Nepal. Currently, Madhesh mostly forms 22 southern districts of Nepal and is home to more than half of the population of Nepal.

Now, the word -- 'developing'. So what does development mean? Roads, bridges, power lines? GDP, economic growth, or human development index? Once there was a time, when development was exclusively equated with economic growth. Thanks to Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen, today it is mostly measured in terms of human development index. However, development is a very complex phenomenon. So despite various indices are widely used, or misused specially where data is distinctively bimodal or multimodal as in Madhesh or Nepal, I don't think a number can capture its inherent complexities. What if you have a doctorate from Cambridge or Harvard, you earn a six-digit salary in dollars, and you expect to live hundred years, and yet you are regarded as untouchables, yet you are judged by the colour of your skin, yet your business and houses are burnt, yet you are made stateless and landless on the very land you and your ancestors were master of, yet you can be shot dead by police anytime without any cause or investigation? So what is development without dignity? What is development without the respect for human rights? What is development without social justice? Obviously current indices mostly fail to capture such things, and so we should not necessarily confine ourselves into particular numbers or indices, rather we should explore the broader meaning and context of development.

Third, the NGOs/INGOs and their role. The reason for including them in the title of the conference is that we did not want to indulge ourselves only in the intellectual discourses, possibly distanced from the reality; rather we want to see the outcomes of the conference making a difference on the ground. Therefore, we took various development actors on the board, here specially, the non-government ones.

There are thousands of NGOs in Nepal, and they have been almost all pervasive. Non-government sectors have been investing hundreds of millions of dollars every year, and despite the principles of the Paris Declaration and some other genuine efforts, the critics have questioned the effectiveness of aid in development. The critics argue that the big plans made in five star hotels and resorts with lavish dinners and lunches have not been able to change much to the poor and underprivileged people in a sustainable way. The ownership of aid and the nature of aid distribution in Nepal have been also very questionable. So indeed it is a very important topic to investigate. However, we do not want to limit ourselves there.

Though the title of the conference includes ‘NGOs/INGOs’, the word ‘non-government organisation’ is intended in the literal sense, almost to mean citizens' or people's effort. So they can be any entity, individual or collective, registered or unregistered, exclusive of government. Nevertheless, we believe the outcomes of the conference will be equally useful to the government agencies and actors, and we will be delighted if we could make any contribution to them.

So now we have clarified the title of the conference. Let's look at the goal.

The underlying goal of the conference is basically to analyse the current condition of Madhesh and sketch a roadmap for its integral development in almost all sectors. Therefore, we initially proposed more than two dozens of areas to investigate in the conference, and several of them have been covered, and we will continue to pursue the remaining areas even after the conference.

Finally, the conference has seen the light of day through the labour and dedication of many. We are grateful to all experts, our team members and volunteers who have put a great deal of efforts to materialise the conference. I would like to thank our supporters: Madhesh Foundation, Dalit Development Committee, and Let's Share Forum. We are very thankful to His Excellency Robert Piper, for agreeing to deliver the keynote speech at the conference. We are equally thankful to our honourable guests for attending the conference and encouraging us in our efforts. And finally, we thank all participants for attending the conference with great enthusiasm.

We hope that the materials presented in the proceeding as well as various discussions and discourses at the conference will prove valuable and become a guiding light for the integral development of Madhesh. This conference is not the end, it is a beginning. So after the conference, equipped with more knowledge, analysis and vision, we request all actors to take up the task of the development of Madhesh with great vigour because the true significance of knowledge lies in its practical use.

At the end, I would like to conclude the remarks and open the platform for you, by quoting -
तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु [“May our learning-together be splendid!”] Thank you very much.