

Insights on Issues of Trade Unions and Industrial Relations: A Perceptual Survey of Opinion Leaders

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Industrial relations system, anywhere, is primarily concerned with the triangular and harmonious relationships between employer, employee and the society represented by the government. Whatever manifestation evolved to express the subject it stood a major aspect that affect the national economy. A good industrial relations system thus acts as an indicator of economic progress and social development of a country. This paper aimed at analyzing the trends regarding the emerging relations of actors of industrial relations system. In this regard, the focus has been levied on making a perceptual survey of opinion leaders so as to understand the dimensions of areas of issues concerning trade unions and industrial relations in Nepal. Based on this understanding, the focus of the paper is to highlight the contemporary issues and suggest industrial relations system for the future. The study included the opinion leaders comprising of trade union leaders (16), practicing managers (11), law makers, lawyers and academicians (11), officials of Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industries (8), and labor related government officers (8). They were interviewed on the basis of a checklist. The checklist consisted of forty statements all positively stated and dealing with dimensions like worker-union relations, union-management relations, union-government relations, and trade unions and industrial relations. Responses were collected on a five point scale similar to that of Likert's scale that indicates the respondent's preference.

Key words: *Harmonious relationship, Opinion leaders, Industrial relations system, and actors of industrial relation system*

Introduction

Nepal is well known for her natural beauty, mighty Himalayas, diverse culture, and cheerful face of people. This mountainous country falls in the southern lap of the Himalayas between China and India. Small and landlocked country Nepal occupies 0.03% and 0.3% of the total land area of the world and Asia respectively. The country's total population was estimated as 28 million by the year 2010 with almost equal proportion of male and female. The per capita GDP was recorded as NRs 41,851(US\$ 562) at 3.53% growth per year in the year 2009/10 (CBS, 2010). Total number of manufacturing establishments (2006/07) accounted to 3446 which include 177550 persons engaged and 169891 persons employed (CBS, 2010). The ratio of male and female population accounted to almost 80% and 20%.

This tiny developing country of south Asia is a country with a short history of industrial development dating back to 1936. From time immemorial, Nepal remained predominantly an agrarian economy where majority of population accounting to 76.9% are dependent on agriculture. Accordingly, the share of contribution of this sector on the GDP has been remarkable which stood to 33.03 % in the fiscal year 2066/67. The growth rate of GDP for both agriculture and non-agriculture sector is however very less, the aggregate figure of which is estimated to remain 3.95 % as against the growth rate of 5.80 % in 2064/65 (CBS, 2009). Nepalese society experienced tremendous changes over the last few decades. However, those changes hardly stood significant so far the process of industrialization is concerned. Closely related to this phenomenon of industrialization, the history of trade unionism and industrial relations is nearly as short.

All Nepal Trade Union Congress (ANTUC) was formed in 1946. Biratnagar Workers Union (BWU) was set up in 1947, and the first workers' movement took place at Biratnagar for the establishment of democracy in the same year. ANTUC and BWU became united and formed the first trade union

federation in Nepal in 1951. The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in 1953 granted membership to ANTUC (FES-NEPAL, 2001). The Monarchy banned all of the political parties and trade unions from early 1960s to the early 1990s.

Within a short span of time, however, the trade unionism and industrial relations in Nepal became a major factor of socio-economic and other changes that took place over the years. Initially, trade unionism and industrial relations had remained undermined and almost un-understood. It remained static and neglected even in spite of the fact that they were conditioned by the then emerged political environment. The industrial workers were weak to organize and launch movements for their just cause on the one hand, and the industrialists had high-handedness in the labor matters, on the other. Likewise, the government was also least concerned on labor-management matters. The triangular relationships between the workers, the employers and the government were so poor that industrial relations remained strained almost for a half century. None of the factors like social, economic and political were favorable neither for trade unions nor for industrial relations. The ethos of industrial relations was not recognized both by the employers and the government during the period.

Though some labor movements were recorded and attempts were made for the development of unionism and industrial relations before and after 1950. Even with the advent of democracy in 1950, unions in Nepal did not present a firm and better picture. The real take-off in this matter, however, took place only after the restoration of democracy in 1990. The changed environment lured a serious thinking among the actors and as a result, all of them were urging for the development of unionism and the industrial relations in the country then and now. It was noticed that after the political change of 1990, due emphasis had been placed by the government which showed good prospects for unionism and industrial relations environment in Nepal. Consequently, substantial number of trade unions emerged in the country.

Insights on Issues of Trade Unions and Industrial Relations: A Perceptual Survey of Opinion Leaders

TABLE 1: TRADE UNIONS IN NEPAL

SN	Trade union/federation/confederation	Unions	Affiliation
1	Nepal Trade Union Congress (NTUC) Independent-Est. 1947	25	Nepali Congress
2	General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT)-Est.1989	27	CPN(UML)
3	All Nepal Federation of Trade Unions (ANTUF)- Est. 2007	31	UCPN(Marxist)
4	Confederation of Nepalese Professionals (CONEP)	NA	CPN(UML)
5	Federation of Nepalese Progressive Trade Unions (FENEP)	NA	CPN(ML)
6	Nepal Trade Union Federation (NTUF)	NA	CPN-Democratic
7	National Democratic Confederation of Nepalese Trade Unions- Independent (NDCONT-I)	NA	Rastriya Prajatantra Party
8	Others (miscellaneous trade unions operating locally/regionally)	NA	

Source: Field Survey, FES-NEPAL, NA: Not Applicable

Industrial relations, in general, can be considered as the relationship between employers and workers, employers' organization and workers' organization as well as between employers' and workers' organizations and the government authorities concerned. The mechanism of industrial relations thus presupposes interdependency and inter-relationship of three parties involved in its process. As industrial relations are eventually human relations, the human

psychology does prevail in the field of industrial relations as well. Industrial relations at any point or stage of its development is regarded as a complex structure composed of actors, contexts, an ideology which bind the industrial relations system together, and a body of rules created to govern the actors at the work place and work community (Dunlop, 1958). Schregle (Schregle, 1982) states that industrial relations are considered as effective instruments for associating employers and workers with the formulation and implementation of development policies.

A review of research investigations undertaken in this field show that only a few studies were undertaken in the past on aspects like demography, trade unions and employers' association documentation, attitudinal survey, developmental needs, knowledge and skill requirements of players, legal and institutional framework, workers' participation, and government role.

Majority of the studies expressed that industrial relations system as well as trade unionism were governed by the authoritarian hierarchical social system in the country's industrial environment. The democratic norms where all the parties involved get equal weight on all issues were almost non existence.

Attitude of players is the essential factor in the industrial relation system that gives the topmost priority to the establishment of harmony in unionism and industrial relations. Contributions of all other factors will have minimal, or no meaning if the perception of the players towards each other will not be supportive. Research and studies on this important facet of unionism and industrial relations are rare. Available materials on this connote that all the players involved in industrial relations system lack the perception which are actually needed for sound industrial relations in the country. Jyoti (Jyoti, 1992) in his paper expressed that industrial relations in Nepal had developed in fits and starts. He further stated that the governments in the past made industrial relations a field where they would test their political strengths with the management and the workers as pawns in the cat-and-mouse game. The present state of industrial relations still carries a hangover from the earlier chaotic days and the situation

till now a drift as aimless as before even after tremendous changes in the political and social arena of the country.

Although the players in the industrial relations share a common fate, the established belief that harmonious relations are only possible between people who share a common fate has been questioned by the findings of the Industrial Relations Project (IRP) study (FNF, 1991). In the light of this phenomenon, this study attempted to investigate the pattern of relationships and understandings between union-labor, union-management, and union-government based on the perceptions of players involved.

This study attempted to present a comparative picture on the emerging trends regarding the development of trade unions and industrial relations based on the major dimensions of trade unions and industrial relations. Perceptual survey of the opinion leaders grouped into five categories was the focal aspect of this study that sought their opinions on forty statements related to the five dimensions. The examination of the collected information has however started showing positive trends on the right development of unionism and industrial relations marginally, though.

Research questions

RQ1. Does positive relationship between worker and union exist and contribute for sustainable development of trade unionism and industrial relations system in Nepal?

RQ2. Does positive relationship between union and management exist and contribute for sustainable development of trade unionism and industrial relations system in Nepal?

RQ3. Does positive relationship between union and government exist and contribute for sustainable development of trade unionism and industrial relations system in Nepal?

RQ4. Does positive perception between the actors of trade unions and the industrial relations reveal and contribute for sustainable development of trade unionism and industrial relations system?

Methods

The method applied was basically a survey conducted to understand the perceptions of opinion leaders regarding issues concerning trade unions and industrial relations in Nepal. The sample categorized hereunder as opinion leaders were interviewed on the basis of a checklist. Altogether forty statements in a checklist form dealing with dimensions like worker-union relations, union-management relations, union-government relations and trade unions and industrial relations were framed. All the statements were positively stated and the responses were collected on a five point scale format (similar to Likert's scale) which indicated respondent's preference. Chi square test had been used for the analysis of the responses so as to ensure their reliability and validity.

Sample

The sample included a wide spectrum of the society that was influential so far in shaping the industrial relations posture in the country and thus termed as opinion leaders. Practicing managers, trade union leaders, labor related government officers, officials of Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FNCCI) as well as law makers, lawyers, and academicians were the people selected as opinion leaders. The total respondents and their responses have been shown in tabular forms.

Checklist: issue, area and dimensions

The responses collected from this survey have been categorized into four areas of issues with corresponding questions and description. The area, issue and the dimensions dealt by the research were as follows.

Insights on Issues of Trade Unions and Industrial Relations: A Perceptual Survey of Opinion Leaders

Area	Dimension and issues
Worker-Union Relations	Had the trade unions won the trust and confidence of labor community? Is there a need of unions for the exposure in the related fields? Does the degree of persuasiveness of the unions on the workers help in accepting technological changes? Do the unions provide awareness building programs for the workers? Do the unions provide skill development trainings to workers to enable them to cope with the new technological changes? Do the trade unions accept social security and welfare of workers as their major concern areas? Does the workers' union work for improving the skill level of workers?
Union-Management Relations	Do the trade unions support the management in change processes? Do unions advise the management on the matters pertaining to technological improvement? Do the unions and the management act complimentarily for the cause of industrial peace? Are the unions and management serious about institutional development and organizational strengthening drive? To what extent do economic matters guide union-management relations?
Union-Government Relations	How far has the Trade Union Act helped in the development of trade unionism? Do the law implementing agencies require capacity development programs? Do the labor courts make early settlement of labor disputes? Does the government provide social services to the working class and seek the cooperation of the union for the peaceful settlement of disputes? Are unions successful to convince and persuade the government to launch programs for their welfare?
Trade Unions	Are trade unions linked to political parties? Are there union

Insights on Issues of Trade Unions and Industrial Relations: A Perceptual Survey of Opinion Leaders

and Industrial Relations	<p>multiplicity and inter-union rivalry? Are trade union leaders committed? Are outside leaders better for the cause of labor and labor community? Has collective bargaining been recognized and treated as norms of industrial relations? Do the players require the knowledge of collective bargaining? Is there a need of system of conciliation and arbitration? Does the labor court avoid government intervention and ensure industrial peace? Is government intervention required for industrial peace? Is authentic labor information available and transparent? Does the information flow between the players without interruption? Are trade unions instrumental in productivity improvement? Do they work for reducing labor turnover, absenteeism and inefficiency? Do the unions welcome gain sharing mechanism and work sincerely for controlling wastage and maintaining discipline? Do trade unions perceive privatization as a necessity for industrial democracy?</p>
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The respondents were categorized into five different categories in order to address the above mentioned issues in different dimensions. Appointment was made in advance with each respondent and a set of structured statements was given in the meeting. The following table consist the category and number of responses. Figures in parenthesis indicate the number of respondents.

TABLE 2: RESPONSE CATEGORY AND NUMBER

SN	Category	Response number
1	Trade union leaders (16)	640
2	Practicing managers (11)	440

Insights on Issues of Trade Unions and Industrial Relations: A Perceptual Survey of Opinion Leaders

3	Law makers, lawyers, and academicians(11)	440
4	FNCCI officials(8)	320
5	Government officers (labor related)(8)	320
Total (54)		2160

Analysis

Based on the responses collected under four broad categories, analysis of the information was made under specific headings. Because, combining of the four headings and analyzing them, the calculations would be neither meaningful nor scientific. This was further supported by the fact that each heading was designed to deal with a particular dimension of the subject under study.

Union-Worker Relations

Worker-union relations would be sound and flourishing only in an environment of trust and confidence, which eventually contributes to the development of unionism and industrial relations. However, a general feeling pertaining to it relates to the fact that workers are alienated and that the relations between the worker and the union has not been good. The general belief puts forward that unions neither care worker's interest nor act dynamically in the changed contexts. To make a clear understanding about how does the general feeling correlates with the actual situation, perceptions of different opinion leaders were collected and analyzed.

With a specific focus on the worker-union relationship dynamics a total of seven positive statements in an interrogative form were given to the respondents and asked them for item wise ranking of the same to find the answers to the aforesaid questions. The following Table relates to the same. The table has been framed to test the research question.

Insights on Issues of Trade Unions and Industrial Relations: A Perceptual Survey of Opinion Leaders

TABLE 3: UNION-WORKER RESPONSE RANKING

Positive relationship between union and worker				
Category	Response ranking			Total Response
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	
Trade union leaders	13	18	81	112
Practicing managers	36	20	21	77
Law makers, lawyers, and academicians	11	21	45	77
FNCCI officials	18	11	27	56
Government officers	19	17	20	56
Total	97	87	194	378

Source: Field Survey

In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the responses **chi-square test** had been done. The following table provides the results of the test.

TABLE 4: CHI SQUARE FOR UNION-WORKER RELATIONS

Observed (O)	Expected (E)	(O – E)	(O - E)²	(O - E)²/E
13	28.74	-15.74	247.77	8.621
36	19.76	16.24	263.76	13.349

Insights on Issues of Trade Unions and Industrial Relations: A Perceptual Survey of Opinion Leaders

11	19.76	-8.76	76.72	3.883
18	14.37	3.63	13.17	0.917
19	14.37	4.63	21.43	1.492
18	25.78	-7.78	60.49	2.347
20	17.72	2.28	5.19	0.293
21	17.72	3.28	10.74	0.606
11	12.89	-1.89	3.57	0.277
17	12.89	4.11	16.90	1.311
81	57.48	23.52	553.12	9.623
21	39.52	-18.52	342.94	8.678
45	39.52	5.48	30.05	0.760
27	28.74	-1.74	3.03	0.105
20	28.74	-8.74	76.40	2.658
378	378		$\sum(O - E)^2/E$	54.919

Degree of freedom d. f. = (R-1) (C-1) or (5-1) (3-1) = 8. The table value of chi square for 8 degrees of freedom at 5 percent level of significance = 15.507 i.e. χ^2 (0.05, 8) = 15.507.

While comparing the calculated and tabulated values of chi square, it was found that the calculated value was higher than the tabulated value (54.919 > 15.507), and hence the perception of the respondents was significant i.e. the test does support that the relationship between union and worker is significant. In addition, the result indicated that the relationship between union and worker are mutually interdependent for the sustainable development of trade unions and industrial relations system rather than independent relationship.

Union – Management Relations

As the union-management relations are dynamic, so is, it affects the industrial relations. There has been a long standing belief that the style of management in organizations is not professionally blended and the master-servant feeling is still in practice. Accepting union as a parallel organization was in question. Common points between them were not available and as a result both of them were regarded mutually opposed. So as to understand the pattern of relationship between the union and the management an attempt was made to collect the information.

For this purpose, a total of five but closely related statements addressing the varied dimensions concerning union-management relations were furnished to the same group of respondents, and asked for item-wise ranking to assess the perceptions of the respondents. The following table reflects the responses.

TABLE 5: UNION-MANAGEMENT RESPONSE RANKING

Positive relationship between union and management				
Category	Response ranking			Total Response
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	
Trade union leaders	16	25	39	80

Insights on Issues of Trade Unions and Industrial Relations: A Perceptual Survey of Opinion Leaders

Practicing managers	18	11	26	55
Law makers, lawyers, and academicians	14	11	30	55
FNCCI officials	11	15	14	40
Government officers	7	9	24	40
Total	66	71	133	270

Source: Field Survey

Chi-square Test had been used to test the validity and reliability of the responses. The following table shows the value of chi square test.

TABLE 6: CHI SQUARE FOR UNION-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS

Observed (O)	Expected (E)	(O - E)	(O - E) ²	(O - E) ² /E
16	19.56	-3.56	12.64	0.646
18	13.44	4.56	20.75	1.544
14	13.44	0.56	0.31	0.023
11	9.78	1.22	1.49	0.153
7	9.78	-2.78	7.72	0.789
25	21.04	3.96	15.71	0.747
11	14.46	-3.46	11.99	0.829

Insights on Issues of Trade Unions and Industrial Relations: A Perceptual Survey of Opinion Leaders

11	14.46	-3.46	11.99	0.829
15	10.52	4.48	20.08	1.909
9	10.52	-1.52	2.31	0.219
39	39.41	-0.41	0.17	0.004
26	27.09	-1.09	1.19	0.044
30	27.09	2.91	8.45	0.312
14	19.70	-5.70	32.53	1.651
24	19.70	4.30	18.46	0.937
270	270		$\sum(O - E)^2/E$	10.637

Degree of freedom d. f. = (R-1) (C-1) or (5-1) (3-1) = 8. The tabulated value of chi square for 8 degrees of freedom at 5 percent level of significance =15.507 i.e. $\chi^2 (0.05, 8) = 15.507$.

Comparison of calculated and tabulated values revealed that the calculated value of chi square was less than the tabulated value ($10.637 < 15.507$), and hence it was found not significant. Since the derived result was not significant. The chi square supported that union and management relations matters untied and independent. Thus the relationship between union and management presented a gloomy picture so far the sustainable development of trade unionism and industrial relations system was concerned.

Union – Government Relations

Good relationships between worker and union and between the union and management are preconditions for the development of healthy industrial relations. In the similar manner good relations between the union and the government cannot be an exception. During different time periods till the dawn of democracy (1950) and even after the restoration of democracy (1990), the stature of unions in Nepal experienced banned, suppressed and not duly recognized. They were mostly treated as the political tools to nurture the then political systems. Even after 1990 there had been a belief that the union government relations were not well pasteurized. Recognition of the unions as important element of industrial relations has yet to be considered. In the light of this universal theoretical perspective, this study attempted to collect the perceptions of respondents so as to find out the current status of the union government relations. For this, a set of seven statements were provided to the respondents and asked them to make item wise ranking. The following table presents the responses collected from the respondents.

TABLE 7: UNION-GOVERNMENT RESPONSE RANKING

Positive relationship between union and government				
Category	Response ranking			Total Response
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	
Trade union leaders	43	31	38	112
Practicing managers	23	16	38	77
Law makers, lawyers, and academicians	23	22	32	77

Insights on Issues of Trade Unions and Industrial Relations: A Perceptual Survey of Opinion Leaders

FNCCI officials	9	14	33	56
Government officers	6	6	44	56
Total	104	89	185	378

Source: Field Survey

Chi-square Test using the responses collected and presented in the above table, has been used to examine the validity and the reliability of the depicted facts. The following table had been framed for the purpose of testing chi-square value as in the earlier cases.

TABLE 8: CHI SQUARE FOR UNION-GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Observed (O)	Expected (E)	O - E	(O - E) ²	(O - E) ² /E
43	30.81	12.19	148.48	4.818
23	21.19	1.81	3.29	0.155
23	21.19	1.81	3.29	0.155
9	15.41	-6.41	41.05	2.665
6	15.41	-9.41	88.50	5.744
31	26.37	4.63	21.43	0.813
16	18.13	-2.13	4.54	0.250
22	18.13	3.87	14.98	0.826

Insights on Issues of Trade Unions and Industrial Relations: A Perceptual Survey of Opinion Leaders

14	13.19	0.81	0.66	0.050
6	13.19	-7.19	51.63	3.916
38	54.81	-16.81	282.74	5.158
38	37.69	0.31	0.10	0.003
32	37.69	-5.69	32.32	0.858
33	27.41	5.59	31.28	1.141
44	27.41	16.59	275.31	10.045
378	378		$\sum(O - E)^2/E$	36.598

Degree of freedom d. f. = (R-1) (C-1) = (5-1) (3-1) = 8 (same as earlier). The table value of χ^2 for 8 degrees of freedom at 5 percent level of significance = 15.507 i.e. $\chi^2 (0.05, 8) = 15.507$.

A comparison of the calculated and tabulated values of chi square showed that the calculated value was higher than the tabulated values i.e. (36.598 > 15.507). This thus indicated that the derived value is significant. As the result, the test did support the fact that union-government relation is mutually interdependent. It thus depicted that union government relations was significant and could be a contributing factor for the sustainability of the trade unions and industrial relations system.

Trade Unions and Industrial Relations

This dimension of the study focuses on a wider view of the trade union including its concepts, process and functioning. Likewise, it also deals with the industrial

Insights on Issues of Trade Unions and Industrial Relations: A Perceptual Survey of Opinion Leaders

relations climate its norms and values as well, in overall Nepalese context. Besides, this part of the study attempted to analyze the perceptions of respondents regarding trade unions and industrial culture of the country thereby making a judgment on the dependability per se in-dependability of the trade unions and industrial relations. To go along these aforesaid purposes, altogether 21 closely related statements were provided to the respondents and asked for item wise ranking. The following table presents the summary of the responses collected.

TABLE 9: TRADE UNIONS-INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS RESPONSE RANKING

Positive relationship between trade union and industrial relations				
Category	Response ranking			Total response
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	
Trade union leaders	79	92	165	336
Practicing managers	59	65	107	231
Law makers, lawyers, and academicians	46	46	139	231
FNCCI officials	29	36	103	168
Government officers	20	17	131	168
Total	233	256	645	1134

Source: Field Survey

Chi-square test was used to assess the validity and reliability of the responses as presented in the following table.

Insights on Issues of Trade Unions and Industrial Relations: A Perceptual Survey of Opinion Leaders

TABLE 10: CHI SQUARE FOR TRADE UNION-INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Observed (O)	Expected (E)	O - E	(O - E)²	(O - E)²/E
79	69.04	9.96	99.26	1.438
59	47.46	11.54	133.10	2.804
46	47.46	-1.46	2.14	0.045
29	34.52	-5.52	30.45	0.882
20	34.52	-14.52	210.79	6.107
92	75.85	16.15	260.76	3.438
65	52.15	12.85	165.17	3.167
46	52.15	-6.15	37.80	0.725
36	37.93	-1.93	3.71	0.098
17	37.93	-20.93	437.89	11.546
165	191.11	-26.11	681.79	3.568
107	131.39	-24.39	594.82	4.527
139	131.39	7.61	57.93	0.441
103	95.56	7.44	55.42	0.580
131	95.56	35.44	1256.31	13.147

Insights on Issues of Trade Unions and Industrial Relations: A Perceptual Survey of Opinion Leaders

1134	1134	52.513
		$\sum(O - E)^2/E$

Degree of freedom d. f. = (R-1) (C-1) = (5-1) (3-1) = 8. The table value of χ^2 for 8 degrees of freedom at 5 percent level of significance = 15.507 i.e. χ^2 (0.05, 8) = 15.507.

The comparison of calculated and tabulated values of chi square showed that the calculated values was higher than the tabulated value (52.513 > 15.507) which indicated that the chi-square value as highly significant thus the result was significant. This dimension of the study also presented the similar inference as were the case of union worker relations, and union government relations. This result further clarified the point that trade unions and industrial relations were mutually interdependent and hence could be a contributing factor for the sustainable development of trade unionism and industrial relations system significantly.

Conclusion

Referring to the analysis carried out here above we concluded that trade unions and industrial relations system in Nepal moving in the right direction. The relationship revealed in the dimensions related to worker-union relations, union-government relations, and the trade unions and industrial relations fairly indicated a sustainable industrial relations system. However, the gloomy picture found in relation to union management relations was quite remarkable for a sustainable development of trade unionism in Nepal. An urgent need of being proactive and responsive for a sustainable co-existence of both the unions and management was indispensable. Tolerating all the impediments resulting from a highly fragile political system of the country, the unions and management should give more emphasis on the orientation, training, and interaction programs between them so as to promote sustainable industrial democracy in Nepal.

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