Interview with Dr. Keshab Man Shakya, Hon'ble Minister for Science, Technology and Environment

Dr. Keshab Man Shakya, granted an interview to Mr. Jeewan P. Thanju, Editor-in-Chief, Hydro Nepal Journal. Excerpts from the Interview.

There have been serious objections from the developers for the long time (about 2 years) taken to approve an EIA report. Why this cannot be done in a few months time?

Generally EIA report comes to the Ministry without proper and required documents to process it. If the developers submit EIA report to the Ministry with all the required documents it will not take more than three to four months to approve the EIA report. After I came to the Ministry, I have directed concerned officials in the Ministry to make EIA timely and transparent and to speed up the approval process.

There is very high pollution in Kathmandu from vehicles and other sources. Why there is no enforcing of the Emission standards in the field; and your Ministry's role is not heard? When will there be an effective monitoring?

In order to deal with the air pollution problems, the Government has taken preventive and corrective measures like import of only unleaded gasoline and less than 0.25% sulfur content diesel; ban on the import of two stroke engine vehicles, second hand and reconditioned vehicles; introduction of vehicle emission standards for existing vehicles plying in the streets; introduction of Nepal Vehicle Mass Emission Standard 1999 (EURO-I) now upgraded to EURO-III for new vehicles to be imported; and phasing out of highly polluting diesel operated three wheelers from Kathmandu Valley and highest priority has been given for the promotion of electric vehicles through incentive mechanism. Beside, our Ministry has introduced vehicle emission testing and green stickers system in five major cities other than Kathmandu Valley.

Major steps have been taken in the area of vehicular emission, provision of environmental inspectors for the management and monitoring of pollution by industries, development of air quality monitoring stations for urban areas specially for Kathmandu have been under taken. Beside introduction of various environmental standards and regulatory measures for controlling pollution there is little success mainly because of the weak institution, lack of proper infrastructure and trained manpower and government's low priority on the sector of environment. The task of controlling pollution is not merely the responsibility of the government but it is equally the role of industries, private sectors, civil society and citizen as a whole. Recently government has made a decision to establish the Department of Environment with a major goal of environmental management and control of pollution. I hope with the establishment of the Department of Environment, it will speed up the enforcement and environmental governance in the country.

Climate change in Nepal is real. The snows in Great Himalayas will be no more in a few decades. How your Ministry plans to tackle this?

Climate change becoming a growing challenge in our pursuit to sustainable development especially for least developed country like Nepal. A study done by CSIRO, 2006 has estimated that in general, the Asia Pacific region will experience increase in temperature by the order of 0.5–2°C by 2030 and 1–7°C by 2070. A similar study conducted by India and the UK also indicate that the Himalayan region will be some of the worst hit due to climate change impacts.

As climate change impacts is a global phenomena triggered by the industrial activities of the developed world, it needs a global cooperation to mitigate and reverse the trends of climate change. As you are aware that Nepal is the least emitter of green house gas. Nepal has maintained 39% of the forest cover and 23.23% of the Nepal's land area is covered by protected and a conservation area which is a significant step in carbon sequestration to halt the impact of climate change. Moreover, MoSTE has initiated various projects to deal with the impact of climate change like Pilot Project for Climate Resilience (PPCR), Nepal Climate Change Support Programme (NCCSP), Scaling up of Renewable Energy Programme (SREP). To deal systematically with the climate change, the Government of Nepal has already prepared National Adaptation Plan of Action to Climate Change, 2010; Climate Change Policy, 2011 and Local Adaptation Plan of Action (LAPA), 2012. I believe that such initiative will certainly help to mainstream climate change issues in our development planning and help to address the impact of climate change in Nepal.

There has been big talk about wind energy in Nepal; but, no concrete steps taken so far for commercial exploitation of wind energy. In our opinion about 200 kW plant each in 2 promising locations could be established as a pilot project; and if the results are encouraging then large scale commercial exploitation can be initiated. What is your view point?

As per AEPC study 3000 MW of electricity can be

generated from wind energy which is far greater than electricity demand of Nepal. However, beside this great potential, there is certain thing that needs to be addressed. For example, there is a need to conduct comprehensive study and mesoscale modeling for estimating exact energy that can be harnessed from wind power. To generate sufficient data on wind power exploitation, we have to expand wind power measurement stations network throughout the country. For demonstration purpose we can install few wind power electricity generating stations in certain part of the country.

What is the output of NAST in regards to investment in it? Are you satisfied with its output?

Nepal Academy of Science and Technology (NAST) is an autonomous body affiliated to the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment with the main objective of advancement of science and technology for all-round development of the nation, modernization of indigenous technologies and promotion of research in science and technology. Investment in science and technology is for the future as output of the investment in this field cannot be materialized in short span of time. Development of technology and findings of any research has to go through rigorous process following scientific protocols and methodology. In fact investment in science and technology sector is not satisfactory as our resources and energy still dedicated to fulfill the basic necessities of the people. But at the same time I want to emphasize that scientific community should be responsible to the people and nation as investment in this field should come with innovative technology that can be applied in real field that serve the advancement of economy and living standard of its people.

The Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation has announced that there will a 5% Environment Service Fee on the annual profits of a hydropower project. The developers claim that they are already paying various taxes and royalists to the Govt. What is your opinion on it?

One thing we need to consider is that any investment in development sector and large scale infrastructure development has negative implication on the environment and ecosystem. In order to mitigate the negative impact of development it is wise to allocate certain percentage of the project cost or the revenue generated from such project to repair the damage caused by the development endeavors. In my opinion holistic development can be achieved only by balancing three pillars of sustainable development that is economic, social and environmental.

Would you like to give any message to the related stakeholders?

Environment is a common entity for all of us in which we live and depend for our survival and well-being. It is our responsibility to protect and manage our environment wisely taking into consideration of the limitation posed by our natural system. The natural system and natural resources that are present in our surrounding is not only for us as it is our responsibility to protect it for future generation also. We should be very careful in the use of natural resources as one person's over use cuts the needs of other individual. It is always good to apply the principle of equity and fair distribution of natural resources that promote peace and harmony in the society. We are facing with unprecedented challenges of climate change and pollution at our door step. In such a circumstances, let us work together to protect our environment and make Nepal a hospitable and prosperous place to live in. Finally, I would like to urge all to work together with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment for our common goal of maintaining a clean, green and pollution free environment. Thank you.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS - WATER RESOURCES

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Water Conservation Conference. Location: Bangkok, Thailand. More info: http://www.ldd.go.th/web_waswac2/index.htm

15-17 May, 2013: The 16th German Dam Symposium. Location: Magdeburg, Germany. The theme for the conference is "Dams ensure the future". Contact Email: jana.radoi@conventus.de. More info: www.talsperrensymposium.de

19 - 23 May, 2013: Fourth Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction. Location: Geneva, Switzerland. Contact Email: CDsymposium@unesco-ihe.org. More info: http://www.preventionweb.net/globalplatform/2013/

29-31 May, 2013: 5th Delft Symposium on Water Capacity Development. Location: Delft, Netherlands. More info: http://www.unesco-ihe.org/CD-Symposium

12-16 August, 2013: The 2013 ICOLD Annual Meeting. Location: Seattle, Washington, USA. Contact Person: Larry Stephens, United States Society on Dams. Contact Email: stephens@ussdams.org. More info: www.icold2013.org

2-5 September, 2013: 12th International Symposium on River Sedimentation. Location: Kyoto, Japan. More info: http://www.dpri.kyoto-u.ac.jp/~ISRS2013/default.html

8-13 September, 2013: The 35th IAHR World Congress> Location: Chengdu, China. The central theme of the Congress will be 'The wise find pleasure in water'. Contact: China Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research (IWHR). Contact Email: iahr2013@vip.163.com. More info: www.iahr2013.org

22-25 October 2013: 7th IWA Specialist Conference on Efficient Use & Management of Water. Location: Paris, France. More info: http://www.iwaefficient.com/2013/

27-29 November, 2013: International Conference on Climate Change, Water Resources and Disasters in Mountainous Regions: Building Resilience to Changing Climate. Location: Kathmandu, Nepal.