

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF COVERING NEPAL:  
HOW REPORTING DIFFERS BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL JOURNALISTS  
AND LOCAL JOURNALISTS

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by  
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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I have wanted to be a journalist for as long as I can remember. I don't think I seriously considered any other profession. Telling stories — stories that didn't get enough attention, stories of people who aren't fairly represented, stories of situations that need to remain in the forefront but get pushed to the back because of the timeliness factor — is what I felt I was born to do. When I started the journalism program at the University of Missouri, I picked classes that pushed me to think of topics and angles I hadn't been exposed to despite the many books I had read and was reading. (The only place I went to without a book in hand or in my bag was a bookshop.)

Murrell (2014) writes that journalism remains one of the few professions still offering “discovery, adventure and possible glory,” (pg. 27). Many journalists become foreign correspondents for the adventure, travel, excitement and, in the case of Robert Fisk, “to be a personal witness to history” (pg. 27). I have been working towards becoming a foreign correspondent, not for the travel or to be witness of history. I want to be a foreign correspondent to tell stories. Stories of places and people that don't seem to get enough coverage, like Nepal with its political turmoil.

A subset of foreign correspondents is parachute journalists — journalists who report on a specific news item in a foreign country for a short period of time. Many studies have shown that parachute journalism has limitations that are

unavoidable (Otto & Meyer, 2012; Erickson & Hamilton, 2006; Palmer & Fontan, 2007; Musa & Yusha'u, 2013). In their 2006 study, Erickson & Hamilton found that “parachute journalism has been portrayed just as simplistically” as critics accuse parachute journalists of portraying their subjects (pg. 45). When I was in Yangon, Myanmar, for a free press conference in 2014, many of the local journalists I spoke with there told me how they did not appreciate a lot of the stories produced by parachute journalists reporting on the conflict between the Rohingyas, the government of Myanmar and some of the Buddhist monks, especially those belonging to the 969 Movement led by Ashin Wirathu. The Burmese journalists would talk about how some of the parachute journalists would not understand or report on the cultural and political history that led to the conflict, or why the conflict erupted when and how it did. Listening to them, I decided I would do everything I can to not be the kind of journalist who ignored the complexity, or who over-simplified an issue.

This study aims to better understand the nuanced differences between the reporting done by international journalists and local journalists in and from the country where the international journalist is reporting. It also seeks to find sourcing patterns — if any — for the two sets of journalists, and whether they match findings from prevailing literature.

## CHAPTER TWO: WEEKLY FIELD NOTES

Aug. 29

### **Internship**

This week at my internship at Voice of America's Media Lab, I produced 60-second videos on the day's headlines from the African continent. The production of the video involves selecting and writing the headlines (from wire services Reuters, AFP and AP), finding relevant video clips with good nat sound, and editing the text and video together.

In addition to the headline-video, I produced the same Africa segment, this time working with voice-overs from a VOA reporter, Mariama Diallo.

One difficulty that I am having with working on the Africa videos is the voice-over section. I am still fine-tuning my ability to cut audio in such a way so as to make it as short as possible without deleting any necessary audio waves. I have gotten the general hang of it, but it takes me many tries to get it right.

### **Links to published work**

Aug. 25: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVI3w6y7zUo>

Aug. 24: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQh-khCnZqg>

Aug. 23: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=783N\\_8EkSus](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=783N_8EkSus)

Aug. 22: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAWBldfEWU0>

### **Project**

For the research project, my chair (Amy McComb) resigned from the school, so I am currently trying to find another chair for my committee. I have also finished a draft of the codebook required for the quantitative analysis and sent it to Harsh Taneja for review.

This weekend, I also did the first search wave to select the articles for my analysis. I used the Factiva and ProQuest Newsstand databases. Since the search results came up in the tens of thousands, I have asked Harsh Taneja on how best to pare the results to come up with a workable number.

### **Seminar**

For the semester's first seminar, my key takeaway from our meet with Mike McCurry was that everything is not the media's fault, and that it is possible to have positive relations with press secretaries.

His idea that combining religion into politics more deliberately will make politics more honest and politicians care more about the "other person" was worth exploring more, especially since America's founding fathers designed the constitution and Declaration of Independence with a separation of church and state in mind. Also, a separation of church and state is also what created the divide between Great Britain and the Vatican, although for very different reasons.

### **Sept. 5**

#### **Internship**

This week, I was re-assigned to produce videos on the election. The process to produce these is a little different than the other products. It requires

more careful selection of which news articles to select as VOA cannot appear to favor one candidate over another.

Also for the election videos, the content has to be created from scratch as there is no pre-shot video that can be used. Another element that goes into production is the use of stand-ups in both English and Portuguese — a language I have no familiarity with.

The challenges this week were working with audio in a language I do not understand and pairing it successfully with the content I had.

I was also helping train a new intern on how to produce the news videos for world headlines. It was helpful in understanding how different people learn best and how to manage working on my own work (with a hard deadline) while simultaneously helping a new team member learn the ropes.

### **Links to work**

Sept. 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BKwda4bw-A>

Sept. 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDHGX64eYnw>

Aug. 30: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWPEmlhNsYY>

Aug. 29: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4VDA7p-zIg>

### **Project**

I was unable to make any progress in my thesis due to a personal commitment. However, Dr. Horvit suggested some changes to the original proposal including a solution on how best to pare the results from my initial search conducted last week. By next week, there will be more progress to report.

## Seminar

We visited the Newseum for our seminar meeting. It was gratifying to see the hard work and perseverance of journalists worldwide on display for the general public, helping them better understand the work of reporters and the importance of the First Amendment.

My two favourite portions of the museum were the 9/11 exhibit, and the section dedicated to press freedom around the world and the journalists killed in the line of duty.

When 9/11 happened, I was in middle school. Not being in America, the event didn't have as much of an impact as it did to American citizens. It was only after moving here did I see how that moment in history changed this country, since I'd only ever experienced the ripple effect.

With some experience in breaking news and with aspirations to work as a foreign correspondent, it was illuminating to see how news media around the world reported the event. It was also sobering to see the work of the photographer — Bill Biggart — who died taking pictures of the event.

I was familiar with Freedom House's Press Freedom Index through my work at Global Journalist. I was happy to note the issues faced by international journalists was also included in the museum. It was also a solemn moment, taking in the wall dedicated to listing the names of journalists who'd died for doing their jobs. I also noticed the names of two journalists whose deaths I'd written about for Global Journalist's free press watch reports. But I also couldn't help but notice

that some names had not been included, names of journalists who'd also died doing their work. Hopefully, they will also be memorialized at the museum in the coming years.

## **Sept. 12**

### **Internship**

This week, I went on camera and recorded my first stand-up for the election video. For someone who talks with her hands, being still on camera was very difficult. However, my supervisor said I did a “pretty good” job and said he would help me get training on how to be a better talent.

The rest of the work week went as usual with me producing videos for VOA60 Elections and America.

I am in talks with another producer at the Media Lab to try and start my own product, something along the lines of an AMA (Ask Me Anything), but hosted on Twitter.

### **Links to published work**

Sept. 12: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxG73Y9Pv48>

Sept. 8: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ul7TY\\_zit0o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ul7TY_zit0o)

Sept. 7: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bXBPdVSCuY>

Sept. 6: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JpOspY5mKM8>

### **Project**

In accordance with suggestions made by Dr. Horvit, I am working on amending my proposal to tie it more tightly with my theoretical framework. Dr.

Horvit and I will also work on either changing my research questions or adding to them to make my analysis more specific. The goal is to make the project more presentable for conferences and to have more quantifiable results from the analysis.

## **Seminar**

This week's seminar was very informative. For the first time, I saw the relationship between journalists and PR representatives through the eyes of the latter.

Even though I knew press secretaries and liaisons do recycle quotes, I felt a little twinge of disappointment when Jon and Sarah from Sen. Claire McCaskill's office confirmed the practice. I agree it is an efficient use of time for both sides, but, as a journalist, I feel I deserve a fresh quote. (Then it falls on me to not ask the same question.) The two of them also reiterated the importance of building relationships and how that can be advantageous to reporters, especially on deadline.

The conversation with Juana Summers has been my favourite so far. She briefly touched on how to do your stories, audience and subjects justice when parachuting into a location — all relevant to my thesis.

We did not talk a whole lot about data. I wanted to ask her about the difficulties in producing data-driven stories when it comes to private entities and individual. While some documents can be accesible through FOIA and Sunshine

requests, I wanted to learn more about how that works for larger media houses like CNN.

**Sept. 19**

### **Internship**

I may get to launch the AMA this week! The supervisor I am working with is going to have me collaborate with one of the other services at VOA for the first AMA. I've written a script for an AMA on Turkey, so in the next day or two, I will meet with the managing editor of the Turkish service to see what we can work out.

I also learnt the VOA CMS which allows the Media Lab to post our content on the different VOA language portals, like Shona, Burmese, English and a few others (primarily African languages). Really, the only thing to learn is what to click for which language service.

Otherwise, the work week was much the same as usual — producing the American and election headlines. I'm trying to pick headlines which are not as widely covered. For example, when Hillary Clinton being back on the campaign trail was dominating headlines, I chose to pick the story on the Clinton Health Access Initiative deciding to break away from the Clinton Foundation if she became president.

### **Links to published work**

Sept. 19: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Xjs2S-IhHQ>

Sept. 15: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvSA-CqHrNU>

Sept. 14: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wu3YoMsUhGU>

Sept. 13: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxb34CUnvzA>

## **Project**

After speaking with Dr. Horvit, we decided to change the methodology of the project. Instead of doing a quantitative content analysis, we decided a qualitative textual analysis will be better. To that end, the number of articles being examined will be reduced to 100, the focus will be on one research question and 10 interviews (if that many journalists can be found) will be conducted.

## **Seminar**

I shouldn't have been, but I was surprised when Louis Jacobson said PolitiFact doesn't use anonymous sources. But when he said that they don't really deal with whistle-blower-type material, and that they don't get any secret data, it made sense. I suppose after two months in D.C., I just figured using anonymous sources is more widespread than not. It must be a D.C. thing.

Jacobson's tips on how the team goes about fact-checking was also helpful. They were similar to what I had learnt in David Herzog's computer-assisted reporting class.

After the session with Jacobson, I'm curious to see the team in action on a big event night, like the debates. I'm also going to try my hand at fact-checking for fun and see how I do.

## **Sept. 26**

## **Internship**

I had a meeting with one of the editors and the social media editor at the Turkish service. We will be producing an AMA style Q&A with an immigration lawyer who can answer questions on how Turks can emigrate to the States, the green card lottery system and other visa-related questions. The editors both said this would be a topic of great interest to the Turkish audience. Although a hard date has not been set yet, the AMA is currently scheduled for the second week of October.

I will also be helping Pat Bodnar, the program manager of Language Services, with a recruiting session at American University later this week.

Otherwise, the work week was same as usual. One of my supervisors, Tony Budny, has said he will have me train a couple of the other interns on how to produce the election videos, too.

### **Links to published work**

Sept. 22: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OILrsp0WsjI>

Sept. 21: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJy0qfZII\\_I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJy0qfZII_I)

Sept. 20: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zM1rfKkHgZI>

### **Project**

I have narrowed down the publications from which I will be sourcing my articles. The selection was based on a search of all published articles on the ProQuest Newsstand database.

The Nepali publications are The Kathmandu Post, The Himalayan Times and Republica. These were the only three media houses reporting on the political

crisis in English. The foreign publications are The Times of India, The Washington Post, The Hindu, Asia News Monitor and The Press.

### **Seminar**

My favourite part about our conversation with Mike Dorning from Bloomberg was when he was sharing his stories about covering the conflict in Iraq. He also briefly touched on his time in Haiti. I see a pattern emerging from stories I have heard and read so far from foreign correspondents: The stories aren't found with officials. To really tell the story of the place you're reporting from, you have to go around on your own and find it, like you would for any other beat.

What has stuck with me from our brief conversation with Linda Douglas was when she said to never, ever lie. Way back in my sophomore year, I remember writing a blogpost for my multimedia class on the many different ways I could have fabricated elements of a story I had recently written for The Maneater. As I wrote that post, and as I reflect on that post all these years later, I realise it is actually very easy for journalists to make things up or falsely attribute information. Yes, editors and copy editors are the filters to ensure that doesn't happen, but if Fareed Zakaria could do it, so could others. And they have. I just have to be sure I don't do the same.

### **Oct. 3**

### **Internship**

I was the talent for two of the videos I produced this past week. My supervisor says I have improved, although he can still hear a slight hesitancy in my voice. I'm working on it.

I also trained two other interns on how to produce the election videos. The idea is to cycle us through the different products, making sure everyone gets a chance to produce all of them.

Otherwise, the work week was same as usual.

### **Links to published work**

Oct. 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8B2En4xnztc>

Sept. 28: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQuw3vVrtm0>

Sept. 27: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLax5j5tBNU>

### **Project**

This week I was unable to do much because my laptop has stopped working and I'm working on getting it fixed. I have, however, curated a list of journalists I to speak with and reached out to them.

Suhasini Haider - The Hindu

Kallol Bhattacharjee - The Hindu

Indrani Bagchi - The Times of India

Keshav Pradhan - The Times of India

Rama Lakshmi - Washington Post (based in India)

Annie Gowen - The Washington Post (India bureau chief)

Prakash Acharya - Himalayan Times

Rajan Pokhrel - Himalayan Times

Akhilesh Upadhyay - The Kathmandu Post (EIC)

Anil Giri - The Kathmandu Post

Thira Bhusal - Republica

Subhash Ghimire - Republica (EIC)

### **Seminar**

This week's seminar was about discussing the first presidential debate, which was very entertaining. I watched it at a bookstore where they livestreamed the debate. While watching it on the "big screen," I was also following along on Twitter and tweeting too. (Twitteratis were very sassy!)

Hillary Clinton started off poised, but she started getting smug towards the end; her shimmy told all. Donald Trump started off very calm, but then you could see Clinton get under his skin. While most of his responses weren't on point, I found myself agreeing with him once — briefly. He was talking about the Iraq war and how America got into it. His first couple of sentences were great, but then his response went downhill. It's a good thing Trump isn't a lawyer because he wouldn't win many of his cases, I don't think.

### **Oct. 10**

#### **Internship**

My Twitter AMA project with the Turkish service tanked. They took my idea and format, and have repurposed it for Facebook Live. They are going ahead with the project, but said they do not need any help or input from me.

I am going to now work on an independent project related to the presidential campaign. After talking to another producer in the building, I will be producing a comprehensive video on the foreign policies of both candidates.

Otherwise, work is same as usual in the Media Lab.

### **Links to published work**

Oct. 10: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwFo8YM8uYs>

Oct. 6: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T\\_s5km7eE6Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_s5km7eE6Q)

Oct. 5: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6xTafMiMRk>

Oct. 4: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tceljmFIX7U>

### **Project**

My laptop is on its way back to me, so I will have a better progress report next week. As of now, I have nothing new to add, unfortunately. I am still waiting on responses from the journalists I reached out to last week.

### **Seminar**

My first thought on meeting the lawyers at Covington & Burling was that I should have done the dual law and journalism master's degrees. My grandfather was a lawyer in India and I took a class on media law, so reading court cases is actually fun for me.

Part of me was disheartened to know that freelance journalists pretty much have to fend for themselves, but the realist part of me thought, "Well, that's not shocking." At least I know what to look forward to as a freelancer.

It was also good to know that I cannot actually use 30-second audio clips unless it's creative commons. Good thing I haven't created any videos that have required me to source audio from outside sources - yet.

## **Oct. 17**

### **Internship**

On Mondays and Wednesdays, I now supervise another intern in the production of the election videos. I also do the stand-ups for some videos. The America-only headlines video is still produced by me, but since it only goes out to some TV-affiliates in Cameroon, there are no published links to those videos.

I have almost finalized the script for my independent video on the candidates' foreign policies.

Otherwise, work is same as usual in the Media Lab. I will be going on another recruiting event for the Language Services, but this time I will be doing it by myself.

### **Links to published work**

Oct. 13: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krkkAt4GFSs>

Oct. 12: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFKYvUklEtQ> (stand-up only)

Oct. 11: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVTaUuGYaOE>

### **Project**

I have downloaded the articles for analysis and started working on them. I have heard back from three journalists so far, and only one of them has given me

a definite time for an interview (Thursday). Hopefully, I'll be able to have at least four (if not more) before the final version of the project needs to be submitted.

### **Seminar**

The conversation with Donna Leinwand Leger was practical and possibly one of the most useful sessions we have had. She talked about her experience covering Indonesia right after the 2004 tsunami, which was illuminating. I would have liked to hear about her first time being a foreign correspondent. She said she used to be a crime reporter before she became a foreign correspondent, and I inferred that reporting on crime helped prepare her better for parachute journalism.

The more I hear about journalists' experiences reporting abroad, the more I get the feeling that regardless of how much prior knowledge you do or don't come in with, you cannot prepare enough for the story around you. A lot of it also seems to come down to keeping your wits about you and thinking through things logically; and if you can be innovative about your logic, you'll be just fine.

### **Oct. 24**

#### **Internship**

I attended a recruiting event at the University of Maryland. I headed this session by myself. I will also be heading for another solo recruiting session for Voice of America in Arlington this week.

On Mondays and Wednesdays, I mostly supervise the production of the election videos. But I am still in charge of producing the America headlines videos every day.

Today, I had the opportunity to spend a few minutes talking with Amanda Bennett, the director of Voice of America, about what the important journalism values and how she is better incorporating them in the company.

Otherwise, work is as usual at the Media Lab.

### **Links to published work**

Oct. 20: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZT-DhYY9MI>

Oct. 18: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JK\\_shn0y--A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JK_shn0y--A)

### **Project**

I am currently working on finishing a first rough draft of the final project. I have had to change the newspapers from which I selected my sample and increase the sample size to 120. Because I have not heard back from many journalists I originally contacted to interview, I sent a third round of emails this past week. I also got in touch with some other foreign and local journalists (in Nepal). Hopefully I will hear from them before long. On the bright side, I have completed interviews with two Nepali journalists. They both work for the publication My Republica.

### **Seminar**

From NPR to Meet the Press, it was a star-studded week for our seminar. We spoke with Code Switch's Keith Woods and the pollster, Peter Hart. The

session with Peter Hart was immensely enjoyable for me. I knew trends were important in polling, but in the election news stories I've included in my scripts so far, very few had any comparison polls to previous elections. Some compare the numbers to the 2012 election, but that's as far as I've seen in the last month or so.

The conversation with Keith Woods was the first time I had heard of deliberate moves to make diversity a priority in the newsroom. I, personally, would have liked to know more about the breakdown of Asians in NPR's newsrooms, especially how that changes across their bureaus nationally and internationally.

Attending the Meet the Press taping was a great experience. To me it seemed like a larger version of the stand-ups I record for the Media Lab.

## **Oct. 31**

### **Internship**

I attended another recruiting event organized by the White House Initiative for Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Other than that, work has gone on same as usual at the Media Lab.

### **Links to published work**

Oct. 31: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_SXn3GCyY1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_SXn3GCyY1s)

Oct. 27: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q87Wxlxzu8M>

Oct. 26: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9\\_JnRglGy8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9_JnRglGy8) (stand up only)

Oct. 25: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cOuM3KloORg>

### **Project**

After turning in a first draft, Dr. Horvit said it would be a better idea for me to do my analysis on 40 articles — 10 articles each for the journalists I will have interviewed by the end of this week (two complete, two in the process).

Apart from the two interviews with journalists from My Republica (Nepal), I have an interview on Wednesday with a journalist from The Times of India. I am in the process of setting up a time with another journalist from India who works at The Hindu. The interview will most likely be on Friday or Saturday.

### **Seminar**

Hearing the stories of how Steven Rich and Amy Brittain got to The Washington Post was a little intimidating. It struck me only later that we didn't ask Steven how he got to the Post. (He said he didn't apply for the internship, but still got it. How?)

It was also good to hear them talk about the projects that didn't work out for them because, as Amy said, every day is not going to have a eureka moment. Her advice of learning to have a temperate response to both the highs and lows of investigative reporting is good to remember not just for reporting, but for life too.

I also really liked what Steven said about Jeff Leen's editing process: what's the minimum you can get out of a story, and what is the story going to look like if you got everything you wanted. It is a process I am going to adopt myself, which I think will greatly improve my own writing and reporting.

**Nov. 7**

### **Internship**

This is my last week at Voice of America. My last day of work is Thursday. I tried my hand at Adobe Premier Pro for the first time. (I have only ever used Final Cut to edit videos, so I can now add another editing software to my repertoire.) I have become better at recording stand-ups in one take. I will also be helping out with covering the election tomorrow.

### **Links to published work**

Nov. 11: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dD4Xd2Ry\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dD4Xd2Ry_o) (stand-up only)

Nov. 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjJA9toma7g>

Nov. 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SlevZMCIVY> (stand-up only)

Nov. 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVx9Ndlp6vk> (Africa headlines)

Nov. 1: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A\\_2T6wskf-A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_2T6wskf-A)

Nov. 1: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_quXC9JirCU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_quXC9JirCU) (Africa headlines)

### **Project**

I have finished coding half the articles. My interview on Wednesday got rescheduled. The fourth interview only got half-way through before the subject had to leave. I should be done with my project in a couple of weeks, at most, barring any further changes.

### **Seminar**

The meeting with Fred Barnes was educational in getting the conservative perspective on the election. It was also the first time I had had the opportunity to speak with someone who was not anti-Trump, but also not pro-Clinton. (I think I have had my fill of Trump supporters, even though it is fascinating to see things

from their perspective.) I liked that there wasn't a lot of looking-over-the shoulder for the editorial process, that the writers could basically write whatever they wanted. Although it didn't answer my question, I was glad to get a perspective on the extent to which Trump's remarks (on women, Hispanics and Muslims) were tolerated by the Republicans. I think it would be an interesting experience to work at a conservative publication even though I am not a conservative.

## **Nov. 14**

### **Internship**

This past week was my last week as a video producer for Voice of America. I produced the usual America headlines and election stories. I also came into work during the evening on election night. I was in charge of VOA60's Twitter account. I also helped with a live shoot in front of the White House by the Kurdish service. Because the results weren't called till after 2 a.m., my supervisor decided it wasn't worth waiting to produce a product that no one was going to use immediately. But the next day, the America video was only about Donald Trump winning the presidency.

### **Links to published work**

Nov. 7: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dD4Xd2Ry\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dD4Xd2Ry_o) (stand-up only)

Nov. 9: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEchOSCkLDs> (stand-up only)

Nov. 10: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_9JJOoHq1Nw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_9JJOoHq1Nw)

### **Project**

I have finished the textual analysis. I have one interview Tuesday morning, which hopefully will go through.

### **Seminar**

This was the most sombre seminar. Hearing Major Garrett talk about covering Trump for 16 months, and hearing him talk about trying to come to grips with the results, was a reminder that there will be times when our work as journalists seems pointless, that we should all just throw in the towel. But he got up and went right back to work anyway, and that is worth it. It reminded me of one of my favourite lines from the movie “Lord of the Rings: Return of the King.” In it, the character of Samwise Gamgee tells Frodo Baggins that “there is some good in this world, Mr. Frodo. And it is worth fighting for.” That is what we as journalists should do — fight to make sure our audience gets the facts, even if they don’t seem to want to hear it, or believe it.

### **Nov. 21**

### **Internship**

I received a certificate from VOA for being an “outstanding intern.” That was nice of the team. I am also currently applying for jobs and internships, so I’m hoping something pans out.

### **Project**

The defense date is a week away. The room has been booked. The final project report will be submitted to the committee by Tuesday.

### **Seminar**

I have learned a lot from our weekly seminars. From setting new personal goals (800 words in less than 20 minutes) to adding things to on my to-learn list (how to pitch a tent), the exposure to a variety of experiences is valuable.

I also find it interesting that taking into consideration the diversity in our class, with all our conversations with all our speakers on the election, we all still missed talking about and questioning the silent majority that came out for Donald Trump. We wondered in our sessions about the what could be some driving factors, but like everyone else, we didn't question that further.

Having said that, it was a memorable semester. The only thing I can suggest is to add more speakers who can talk about foreign reporting, but perhaps that may not be an interest for every class that comes in.

## CHAPTER THREE: SELF-EVALUATION

From my work at Voice of America, I learnt how to quickly scan headlines and make the editorial call of which stories would be news for those watching our products in different parts of the world. Performing the gatekeeping function myself taught me sometimes even though I think a story is important for people to know, it may not be an important story for the audience and would not serve their interests. For the videos I was producing, I had to be conscious of the different audiences each of the different products catered to. For audiences around the world, sometimes the only American news that was of any value was related to the election. Other times, the most important news of the day were the bomb blasts in Quetta, Pakistan, or the earthquake in central Italy. To pick the news headlines for each of the different videos, I had to remember that I had to pick the headlines that would be the most important for the main audience of that product. For example, the main audience of VOA60 Africa was the citizens of Africa. VOA60 America videos were aired on TV in Cameroon, so the headlines for those videos were about forest fires over large areas of land, or about the clowns terrorizing the country, or even the train crash in New Jersey.

I also learned how to operate heavy recording equipment and record stand-ups, adapting quickly to different on-air talents. Some speak quickly, some speak slowly, and matching the teleprompter to their speed without affecting the audio is

a skill. I also learned how to read news in front of the camera, and how to record my own stand-ups. As someone who speaks quickly and talks a lot with her hands, it took a lot of conscious effort to keep my hands steady and to enunciate each syllable without making it deliberate. It took a few recordings, but I finally got the hang of it to the point that I could record a stand-up in under five minutes, from setting up the camera and tele-prompter to reading the script.

Being on camera also taught me more about my own writing style. Writing for print or online is different than writing for broadcast. Sometimes, some words that seem to work in writing don't flow well together or don't sound good when spoken out loud. For example, a particular word could be repeated in print in a particular paragraph — sometimes even a sentence — but that would not work when reading it out loud from a script as it would not sound natural. And script-writing, I've learned, is about sounding natural. It's about making it seem as if the talent is not reading from a screen, but is speaking extemporaneously.

From the seminars I learned many valuable tips to be a more mindful and thorough journalist. I learned from Major Garrett that even when you feel like your work does not make a difference, you get right back up and continue to do your due diligence. From Keith Woods I learned to appreciate a person's diversity in their ordinariness. The class' session with Peter Hart showed me that even the best of us can be wrong, that we can sometimes not question an element we know exists but we don't pay attention to. It was reiterated to us again and again: build

relationships. Journalism is about telling the stories of people, and you can't tell a person's story without building a relationship with them. Like Donna Leinwand Leger said, it's better to have a few in-depth interviews than many surface-level interviews. Down the line, if and when I get asked about a defining moment in my journalism career, one of those will definitely be the semester spent in Washington, D.C.

During my time in Washington, I also learned the value of initiative and making connections. I was asked to film the award ceremony for the Alfred Friendly Press Partners closing reception held at the National Press Club. It was the first time I had covered an event on camera instead of writing about it. It was definitely a fun experience, and a great privilege to meet the press partners.

I also filmed the 2016 Freedom of Information Summit for the National Freedom of Information Coalition. It was my first time working with an audio box, but it was not difficult to figure out. I am pleased that despite not having worked a lot with video and audio, I quickly figured out the best vantage point from which to shoot the video and record the audio. After these experiences — both independently and with Voice of America — I am confident in my abilities to pick up a camera, arrange the lighting, ensure good audio levels and record whatever it is I have been assigned to.

The connections I have made in D.C., with journalists from Voice of America, with other interns that I worked with, are ones that I will continue to

cultivate. As I learned from our speakers, relationships are built by staying in touch with people beyond just whenever you need some information from them. Relationships should be cultivated from staying in touch, conversing about more than just what one person needs from another. It's about being human.

## CHAPTER FOUR: EVIDENCE

### Links to work produced while at Voice of America

Aug. 22: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAWBldfEWU0>

Aug. 23: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=783N\\_8EkSus](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=783N_8EkSus)

Aug. 24: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQh-khCnZqg>

Aug. 25: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVI3w6y7zUo>

Aug. 29: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4VDA7p-zIg>

### **Illustration 1: Screenshot from the VOA60 Africa video produced on Aug. 29**



a bomb attack at a restaurant near the

Aug. 30: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWPEmlhNsYY>

Sept. 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BKwda4bw-A>

Sept. 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDHGX64eYnw>

Sept. 6: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JpOspY5mKM8>

### **Illustration 2: Screenshot from the VOA60 World PM video produced on**

Sept. 1



Sept. 7: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bXBPdVSCuY>

Sept. 8: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ul7TY\\_zit0o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ul7TY_zit0o)

Sept. 12: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxG73Y9Pv48>

Sept. 13: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxb34CUnvzA>

Sept. 14: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wu3YoMsUhGU>

Sept. 15: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GvSA-CqHrNU>

Sept. 19: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Xjs2S-IhHQ>

Sept. 20: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zM1rfKkHgZl>

Sept. 21: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJy0qfZI1\\_I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJy0qfZI1_I)

Sept. 22: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiLrsp0WsjI>

Sept. 27: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLax5j5tBNU>

Sept. 28: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQuw3vVrtm0>

Oct. 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8B2En4xnztc>

Oct. 4: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tceljmFIX7U>

Oct. 5: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6xTafMiMRk>

Oct. 6: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T\\_s5km7eE6Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_s5km7eE6Q)

Oct. 10: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwFo8YM8uYs>

Oct. 11: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVTaUuGYaOE>

Oct. 12: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFKYvUklEtQ> (stand-up only)

**Illustration 3: Screenshot from my stand up for the VOA60 Election video produced on Oct. 12**



Oct. 13: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krkkAt4GFSs>

Oct. 18: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JK\\_shn0y--A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JK_shn0y--A)

Oct. 20: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZT-DhYY9MI>

Oct. 25: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cOuM3KloORg>

Oct. 26: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9\\_JnRglGy8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9_JnRglGy8) (stand up only)

Oct. 27: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q87Wxlxzu8M>

Oct. 31: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_SXn3GCyY1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_SXn3GCyY1s)

Nov. 1: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A\\_2T6wskf-A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_2T6wskf-A)

Nov. 1: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_quXC9JirCU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_quXC9JirCU) (Africa headlines)

Nov. 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SlevZMCIVY> (stand-up only)

Nov. 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVx9Ndlp6vk> (Africa headlines)

Nov. 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjJA9toma7g>

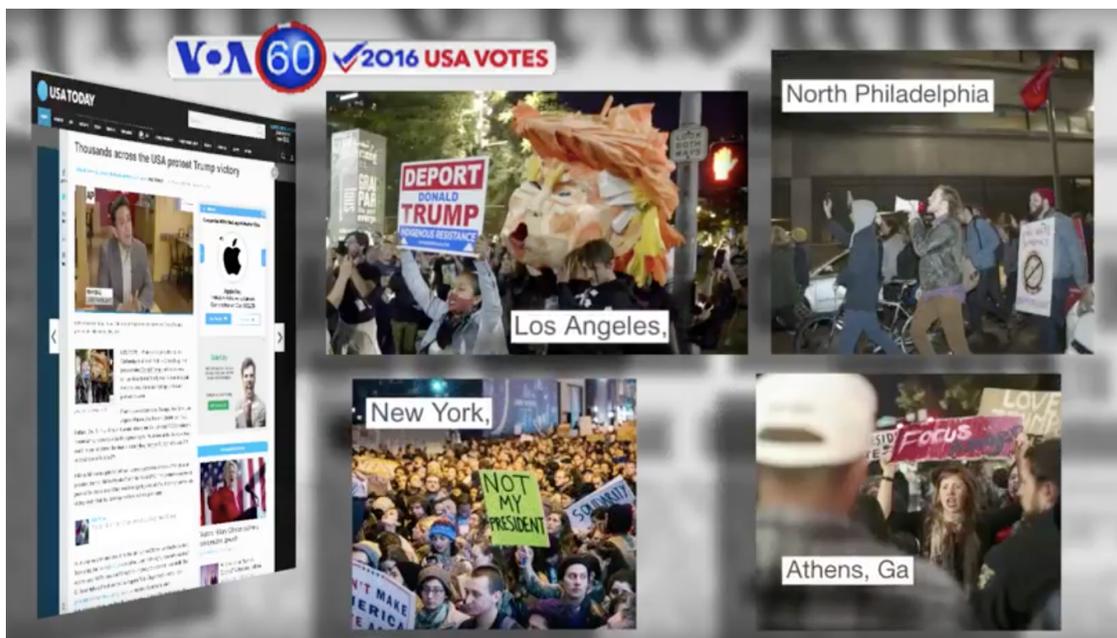
Nov. 7: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dD4Xd2Ry\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dD4Xd2Ry_o) (stand-up only)

Nov. 9: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEchOSCkLDs> (stand-up only)

Nov. 10: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_9JJOoHq1Nw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_9JJOoHq1Nw)

Nov. 11: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dD4Xd2Ry\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dD4Xd2Ry_o) (stand-up only)

**Illustration 4: Screenshot from the VOA60 Election video produced on Nov. 10**



## CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS

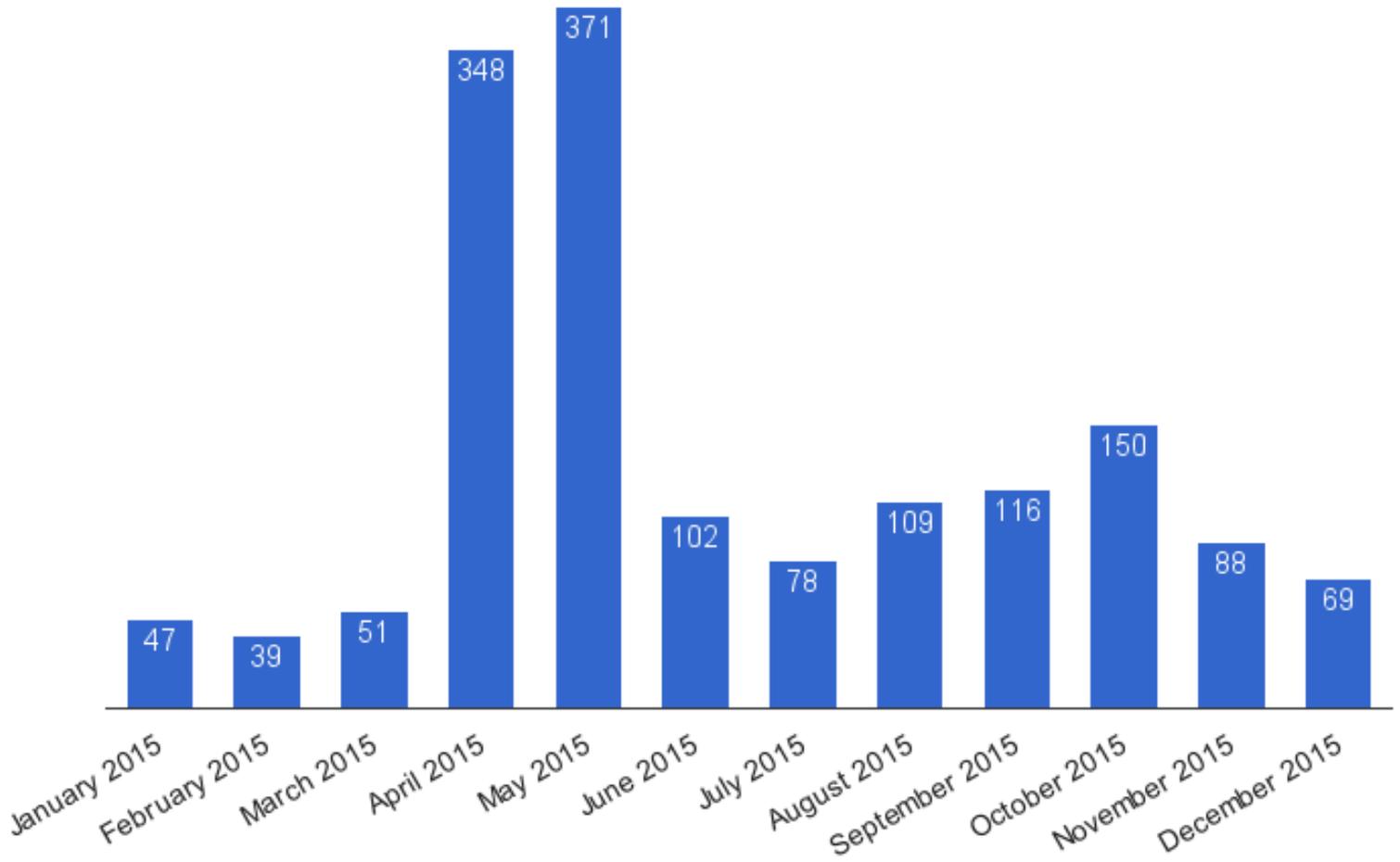
In August 2015, an ethnic group in Nepal called the Madhesis was protesting the text of a constitution that had been eight years in the making. Making up about 30 percent of the Nepalese population, the Madhesis felt excluded from the process of writing the constitution. They also felt the constitution was discriminatory against them, treating them as second-class citizens. Amid these protests, which often turned violent, Nepal's constituent assembly promulgated the constitution in September.

Soon after, a human blockade was set up on the southern border of Nepal and India, the region where most of the Madhesis live, to prevent trucks with essentials like food and fuel from entering Nepal. The Indian government was also unhappy with Nepal's constitution and unofficially supported the blockade. As a result of the blockade, Nepal faced severe food and fuel shortages, especially since it came on the heels of the devastating April 2015 earthquake. It was not until February 2016 that the blockade ended.

This political crisis was covered in varying degrees by international media houses. By its very nature, parachute journalism does not allow for consistent coverage, focusing instead on episodic coverage. In 2015, significantly more articles were published about Nepal in April and May (when the earthquake occurred that killed nearly 9,000 people) than any other time in the year. Figure 1 shows the distribution of articles published in ten major news outlets like The New York Times, Al Jazeera English, All Africa, The Globe and Mail, Agence France Presse and The Guardian. The most number of articles published were around the time the earthquake occurred, and coverage of the country dropped thereafter; remaining higher than the pre-earthquake period.

**Figure 1: Trends in international news coverage of Nepal in 2015**

**Total number of articles published on Nepal in 2015 by international news outlets**



*Source: Factiva, Inc. Newspapers selected: AFP, Al Jazeera English, All Africa, BBC, The Globe and Mail (Canada), The Guardian, The Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal Online, The Washington Post*

I was curious about how coverage about Nepal differed between foreign and local publications once all eyes were no longer on the country after the earthquake. I conducted a textual analysis of 50 randomly selected news articles from three publications (My Republica, The Wall Street Journal and The Hindu) over a period of five months: August through December 2015. The Hindu is based in New Delhi, the capital of India. Articles from The Wall Street Journal has offices in many cities around the world, but for the purposes of this analysis, I considered the Journal’s New Delhi

office as its base. My Republica, a print and online news source publishing in Nepali and English languages, is based in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. I also interviewed three journalists — two from My Republica and one from the Journal. (Requests for interviews with journalists from The Hindu eventually did not lead anywhere.) I broke down the crisis into five categories to see which topics about the political situation got the most attention. Scholars like Aliyu Musa and Muhammad Yusha’u say international journalists tend to heavily rely on officials as sources in their reporting. I wanted to see how that played out in Nepal’s coverage, so I also analyzed the articles for sourcing patterns, breaking it down to 11 categories of sources.

In my interview with him, Krishna Pokharel, a Nepalese journalist working for The Wall Street Journal’s division in India, said that for every story he wanted to write on Nepal, the news event had to be big news and have some regional impact or connection to India. “...there were news events that might be monumental for the people in Nepal, but they might be of no consequence to our [The Wall Street Journal] audience back home and they might not get covered,” Pokharel said. The selective coverage of Nepal does not provide a complete picture of the political landscape in the country and gives an incomplete understanding of the situation. Pokharel wrote 37 articles in the August to December 2015 time frame (including those used in my analysis), most related to news in India.

### **Topics covered by newspapers covering Nepal**

Other issues related to being an international journalist include a heavy reliance on official sources, a dearth of local context and not a lot of follow-up stories, according to some scholars like Jerry Palmer and Victoria Fontan. Despite that, international journalists are necessary to the news cycle because local journalists can get so accustomed to certain customs and practices that they no longer see something as newsworthy, Pokharel says. On the other hand, local journalists covering Nepal’s political crisis reported on the details instead of focusing on just the big decisions, says Thira Bhusal, a reporter for My Republica. “We covered each and every bits and pieces, each

and every discussion, debates and disputes on each and every provisions,” he said. In the selected time frame for the analysis, My Republica published over 1,400 news articles on the five topics (the constitution writing process, negotiations and talks with political leaders and parties, the conflict with the Madhesis, the economic blockade and its consequences, and other topics).

My textual analysis shows that international news outlets are more likely to devote more space to a number of topics in any single article. But international coverage lags behind local coverage, which is more immediate. For example, while local publications like My Republica had daily reports on the writing of the constitution, and the related meetings and negotiations with different political parties in Nepal, it was only in August — months after the earthquake — that The Wall Street Journal picked up the topic again. (Pokharel said he had been reporting on the topic since 2007, when he joined the Journal’s staff.) This ties back to what Pokharel and Bhusal both said about covering events for an international audience. “They [international journalists] would pick only that topic which is readable for international audience; otherwise they would not cover the details like we [local reporters] did,” said Bhusal.

Besides the timing of publishing articles and the space devoted to topics, coverage does not tend to differ much between a foreign publication and a local one. What made the difference in the coverage was the degree to which a particular topic was covered, which ends up making all the difference in how audiences are informed. Foreign publications devoted a few paragraphs each to at least two out of five topics in any given article. Local publications tended to cover one topic per article, sometimes two. Few articles covered three topics, but never more than three topics at a time.

### **Types of sources used by newspapers covering Nepal**

Many studies have found that international and parachute journalists tend to rely more on officials as sources rather than using subject experts or citizens (Erickson and Hamilton, 2006; Macdonald, 2008; Musa and Yusha’u, 2013). When it came to covering Nepal, the use of officials as primary sources of information was high across both local

and international publications, especially since the stories were related to the political crisis. As shown in the table below, the number of sources used by the local publication is higher whereas the foreign publications spoke to a comparatively lesser number of officials, which Bhusal says is because foreign journalists “always talk to very limited sources.”

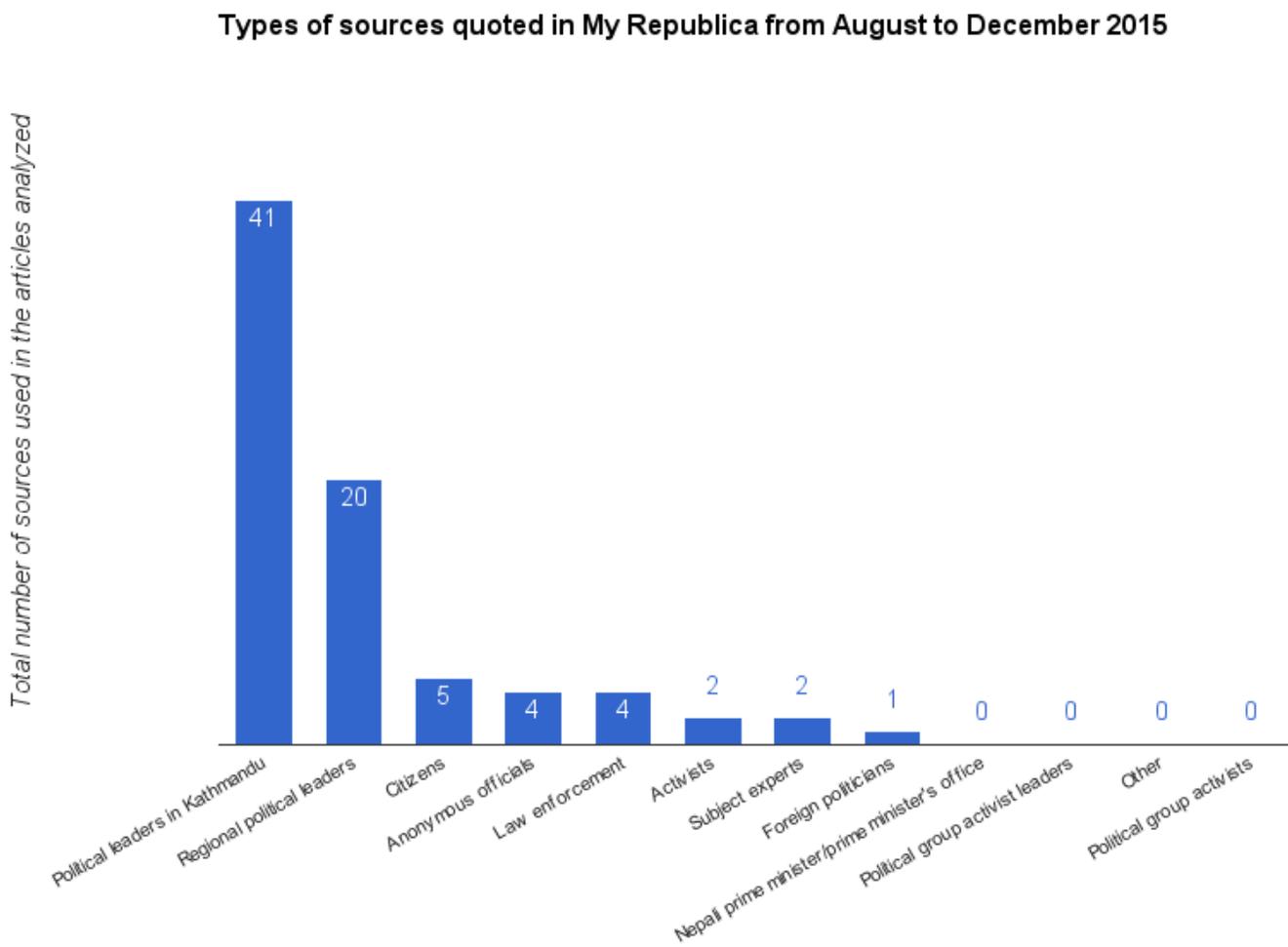
However, even in stories related to the economic blockade and protests, more government and law enforcement officials were used as primary sources. According to Bhusal, politicians make themselves available to the journalists — even foreign journalists — for comments or questions. “At the end of the day, they would brief the pressmen or talk to them over phone, personally, in person, and then we go for the printed editions,” he said.

<b>Table 1: Total number of sources used in all articles, broken down by newspaper and type of source.</b>			
<b>Types of sources</b>	<b>Newspapers</b>		
	<b>Republica (23 articles)</b>	<b>WSJ (7 articles)</b>	<b>The Hindu (20 articles)</b>
<b>Nepalese officials</b>	65	27	13
<b>Foreign officials</b>	1	8	18
<b>Anonymous officials</b>	4	5	15
<b>Activists</b>	4	1	2
<b>Experts</b>	2	0	4
<b>Citizens</b>	5	5	6

With that being said, local journalists have a wider variety of government official sources as opposed to foreign publications. International publications tended to use more quotes from ambassadors, the prime minister (or a spokesperson from the prime minister’s office) or other high-ranking officials from political parties. As seen in the image below (Figure 2), political leaders in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, and regional political leaders elsewhere in the country are the top most used sources for the

local publication. While it would make sense for stories with a larger political theme to feature more politicians as sources, there were many articles where quoting regular citizens would have added to the narrative. In his interview, Bhusal said reporters from My Republica spoke to a variety of people for their stories, experts, human rights activists and citizens. But based on my analysis of the 27 articles, only five citizens were interviewed for stories, and two activists and subject experts were used as sources.

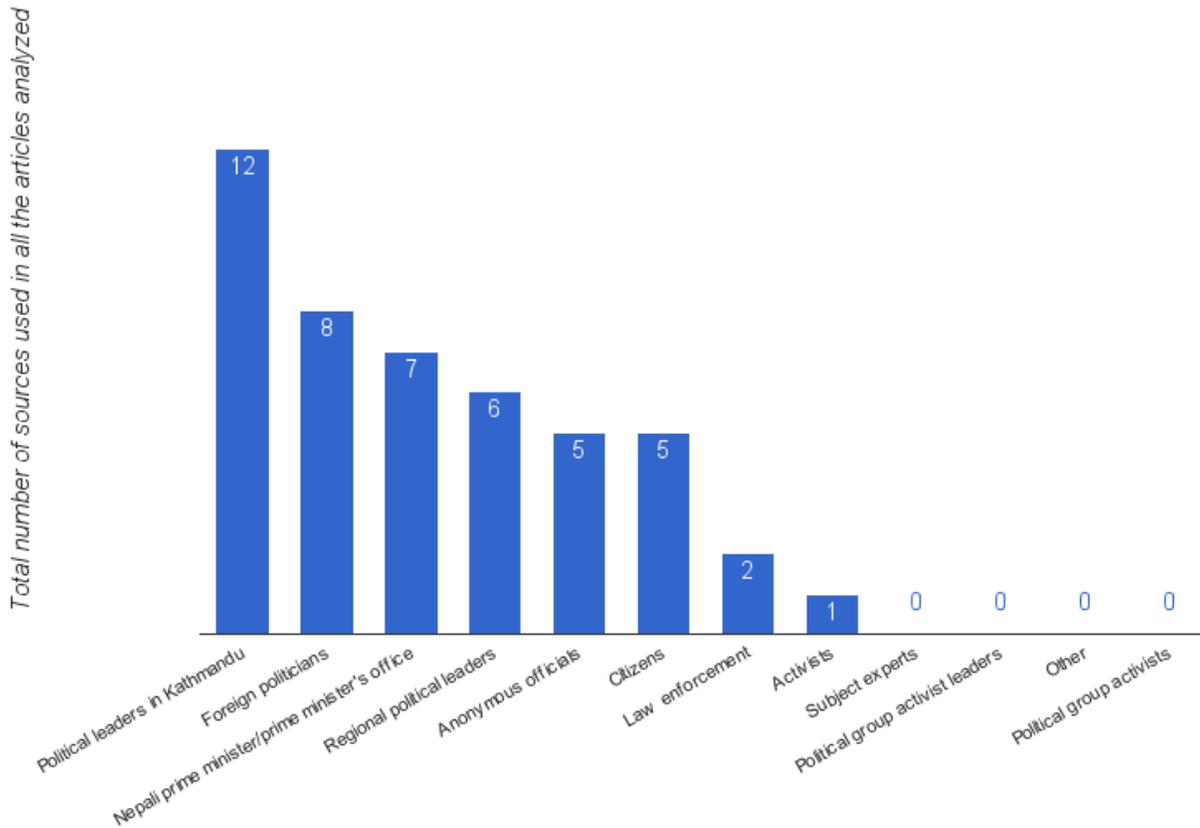
**Figure 2: Sourcing trends in My Republica**



This trend is also seen in reports from The Wall Street Journal and The Hindu, where citizens only accounted for five and six sources, respectively. Analyzing a larger sample

**Figure 3: Sourcing trends in The Wall Street Journal**

**Types of sources most quoted in The Wall Street Journal from August to December 2015**



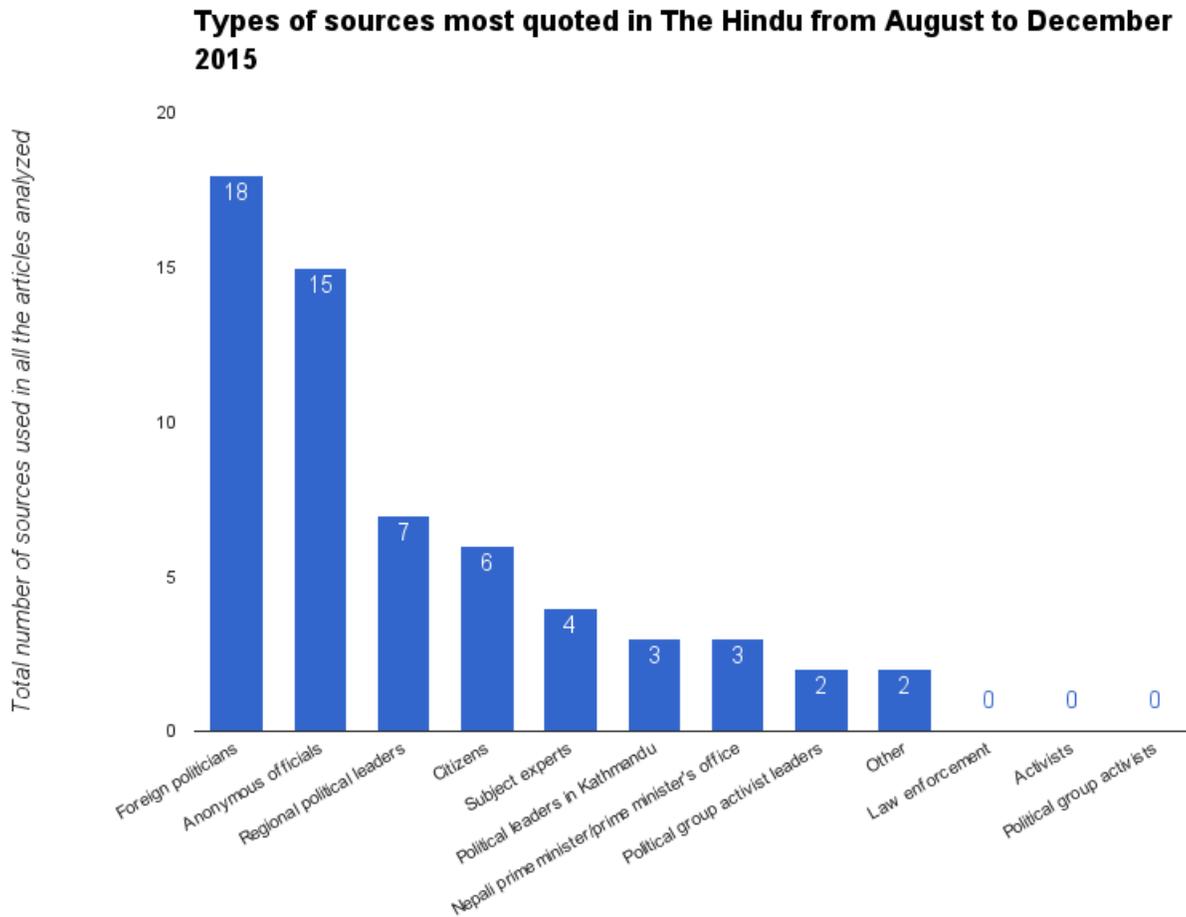
of articles from all three publications over a longer time frame would show how far this trend is followed.

Subhash Ghimire, the editor in chief of My Republica, said international and parachute journalists who come in to report on Nepal tend to already have their own circle of sources that they use from which they typically do not deviate. He said:

“...they [international journalists] have their own hanging out places, their own set of people who subscribe to the same value system, who subscribe to the same thinking processes, so theirs becomes a different world. And when these journalists come in, obviously they are their first point of contact, and they have already made up their mind about the stories.”

Pokharel said of his sources that they were those he had cultivated from when he lived in Nepal. And, as it is anywhere else in the world, he would call the offices of the

**Figure 4: Sourcing trends in The Hindu**



ones whose direct numbers he did not already have. As seen in Figure 3, official voices dominated the narrative in reporting from the Journal. Pokharel said:

“Like politicians from these political parties in the south, Madhesi parties, I know them — not personally, but as a journalist, as my sources. Reaching out to the governmental spokesmen, most of them are... their contact details are easily available on government websites. If their direct numbers are not available, you try their official numbers and eventually reach them.”

One aspect of using officials as sources is quoting them anonymously. It was more common to see international publications use anonymous sources than for local publications to do so. Combined, The Hindu and the Journal used a total of 21 anonymous sources, whereas My Republica only had four anonymous sources.

Remember, the Journal used five anonymous sources in seven published articles. It begs the question about editorial policies that play a factor in choosing sources, as well as questions about access to sources on the record. Among the top five most used sources for international publications, anonymous sources were the second most used in The Hindu and the fifth most used in the Journal. The Hindu relied less on political voices from Nepal compared to the other two newspapers.

Using quotes from the prime minister of Nepal, or from a spokesperson from the prime minister's office, was also a more common practice among the international publications. The Wall Street Journal tended to use tweets from the prime minister's account when quoting him. In my interviews with Bhusal and Ghimire from My Republica, we did not talk about the lack of quotes from the prime minister or his spokesperson. It is possible that the prime minister was not a source because politicians more directly involved with the writing of the constitution were used as sources.

Other sources that can be tapped for covering Nepal include the expatriate community, which can provide useful background information on what is happening on the ground, says Ghimire. Another way for international journalists to get around relying heavily on officials as sources is to use social networks like Facebook and Twitter, which "gives you some idea of the narrative that's building and different ideas being contested," says Ghimire. The idea of using social media to leverage sources leads to an "open space of information exchange" instead of a "closed system of newsgathering," which would be the traditional, official sources (Heinrich, 2012, pg. 767). Talking to a multitude of sources is also a good practice, says Bhusal, especially since it provides a range of perspectives on a topic. "...some [sources] hold moderate views, while some are too radical. You also have to talk to other ethnic groups, you have to talk to major political, other political forces, and...experts." At the end of the day, however, both Ghimire and Bhusal agree there is no substitute for actually being on the ground.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **PROJECT PROPOSAL**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

I have wanted to be a journalist for as long as I can remember. I don't think I seriously considered any other profession. Telling stories — stories that didn't get enough attention, stories of people who aren't fairly represented, stories of situations that need to remain in the forefront but get pushed to the back because of the timeliness factor — is what I feel I was born to do. When I started the journalism program at the University of Missouri, I picked classes that pushed me to think of topics and angles I hadn't been exposed to despite the many books I had read and was reading. (The only place I went to without a book in hand or in my bag was a bookshop.)

Classes like cultural anthropology, international journalism (with Beverly Horvit), contemporary Chinese film (with Michael Volz), world political geography (with Larry Brown), Korean unification (with Seungkwon You) and controls of information (with Brett Johnson) showed me the different ways regions of the world intersect with each other, how people interact with the law and ethics, and provided example after example of why paying attention to trends is important. These classes helped swell the perspectives I was collecting and gave me lenses I could use to look at one event or issue differently.

It's one thing to have different perspectives and another to be able to employ them in writing. I had always been proud of my way with words (my name, Lakshna, roughly translates into "the power with which a word expresses itself", according to a Hindi dictionary my grandmother has). But I never truly appreciated how much I still had to learn — am still learning — about writing coherently and concisely without losing the life of the story. The chance to write different kinds of stories came with my stint at the Columbia Missourian during the summer of 2013 with Elizabeth Brixey as my editor. Sitting with her and the assistant city editors to edit my stories made me realize that writing wasn't all that I wanted to do. I wanted to edit too. And I got that chance working with Global Journalist under Amy McCombs and Jason McLure. Other classes that helped me with my writing, interviewing and editing skills were computer-assisted reporting (with David Herzog), business reporting (with Randall Smith), a blogging class under the Russian department and a class on the basics of copy editing (with then-visiting professor Monica Kwasnik).

I have been working toward becoming a foreign correspondent. In my research I have become consciously aware of the many constraints foreign correspondents face both professionally and personally. Through the successful completion of this project, I hope to add to the discourse of what it means to be a responsible foreign correspondent, aware of the pitfalls, ramifications and reach of the work I will do, both in terms of the finished product and in the process of finishing the assignment.

## **PROFESSIONAL SKILLS**

I was a part of the journalism school's Fall 2016 Washington D.C. program. I worked as a video producer for the Media Lab at Voice of America. Under the supervision of Anthony Budny and Damir Bebic, I produced 60-second news videos. While I was working there, there were five main products: VOA60 World, VOA60 World PM, VOA60 Africa, VOA60 America and VOA60 Elections. I started with World and World PM, then Africa, then America and Elections. By the time I was working on the election videos, I was also training and supervising the other interns. In addition to recording the stand-ups for the election videos, I also got to be the on-air talent, giving me some experience with being on camera.

## ANALYSIS

Assigning reporters to specifically cover international news has been going on for a long time. Parachute journalism — sending a reporter to a location to cover a news event and then bringing them back immediately after — has also been a long-established journalistic practice. Despite that, the literature on parachute journalism is limited compared to the literature on foreign correspondence. With all the studies on the source of sources and their uses in foreign reporting, it seemed appropriate to conduct a study on frames that are employed while reporting in different capacities.

By its nature, parachute journalism “gives the public a much thinner sense of what this is all about because you [the journalist] don’t know it yourself,” (Erickson & Hamilton, 2006, pg. 33). According to Musa and Yusha’u (2013), it has five characteristics: reaction to a breaking news story, keeps up with the competition for the story, few follow-ups, uses more official sources and focuses more on the story at hand than at contextual and social factors.

The characteristics of parachute journalism are also its limitations. Given those limitations, understanding the types of stories covered by parachute journalists and their choice of sourcing will help guide future reporting. At the very least, it will make apparent the gaps in topical coverage between local

reporters and foreign reporters, thereby providing a point of reference for studies that can be more extensive and in-depth.

## **Background**

In April 2015, an earthquake of 7.8 moment magnitude hit Nepal, killing over 8,800 people, injuring almost 22,000 and causing \$10 billion in damages. The earthquake received extensive global news coverage. In September, while still in the process of recovering from the earthquake, the government promulgated its constitution and experienced political upheaval. Few news organizations paid attention.

The ethnic group, Madhesis, protested the new constitution saying it discriminated against them. The protests led to violent clashes between the civilians and police. An economic blockade from India followed, resulting in a severe lack of everyday commodities like fuel, food and medicine. Eventually, India lifted the blockade, but till months later.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A 1993 study by John Fryman and Benjamin Bates found that “differing bases for news judgments among countries in the differing criteria used by various gatekeepers” was a factor in selecting news (pg. 182).

By its very nature, journalism employs the social theory of gatekeeping, which is the idea that gatekeepers — in this case, journalists and editors — select the stories that become news. Bennett (2003) identifies four “gates” which influence content selection:

1. The reporter’s news judgment both personally and professionally.
2. The organizations’ newsgathering “routines” that go towards establishing relations between the reporter and the source.
3. Financial limitations with respect to how the news is produced.
4. The technology that defines limits on the newsgathering process in terms of “time and space” (pg. 368).

For a country’s events to be put on the international stage, it has to be believed by the “lead” media outlets, like The New York Times (Otto & Meyer, pg. 208). Cassidy (2006) wrote “reporters stood a better chance of having their ideas accepted by the editors if a story on that subject had already appeared in such a publication,” (p. 8). This is an example of gatekeeping.

First developed by Kurt Lewin in 1947 as a social psychological theory to explain how changes could be made to people’s eating habits, gatekeeping theory

in journalism has come to mean that the frame of a story is decided by a journalist (Shoemaker et al, 2009, pg. 75). Shoemaker et al trace the evolution of the gatekeeping theory in journalism, identifying who the gatekeepers are and how those gatekeepers play their role. They start with a case study by David Manning White (1949) on how a news editor solved “the intuitively obvious question of how news organizations solve the problem of so much information and so little space” (pg. 75). Citing Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes and Wilhoit, the authors identify gatekeepers as “those who have editorial responsibility for the preparation or transmission of news stories or other information, including full-time reporters, writers, correspondents, columnists, news people and editors” (pg. 77).

Based on interviews of 27 journalists working for U.S. news organizations in Europe, Hahn & Lönnendonker (2009) found that there is more interest in covering news from countries where either there are U.S. troops stationed or where there is a tie to the U.S. military. The study also found that in the post-9/11 world, “Anything now that relates to the Muslim world — even though Americans don’t engage internationally as they should — would pique the interest a little bit more than many other stories” (pg. 507).

In their 1990 study of how American editors chose which foreign news events to cover, Chang and Lee found that newspaper editors fell in two camps when deciding what foreign news event to cover those who selected news based

on content, and those who selected news based on context (pg. 561). A common factor on how editors in both camps select news is organizational constraints.

According to Otto and Meyer (2012), shifting business models affecting the sales of print news of organizations in the Western countries is adversely affecting the financial ability of those news organizations to fund the coverage of international news. News organizations like The Boston Globe have closed all their foreign bureaus while others, like The Independent in the U.K., are scaling back or employing freelancers/stringers rather than sending their own full-time reporters (pg. 206). This has brought more attention to parachute journalism and the use of fixers — individuals or local journalists who help foreign journalists with sources, translation, setting up interviews, etc. The use of fixers has accelerated due to an increase in conflict zone reporting in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan.

With this as a background, my professional project analysis will examine the difference in coverage through a content analysis of stories filed by parachute journalists and stories filed by foreign correspondents that have established themselves in one particular country. A comparison will also be made to reporting done by local reporters.

With digital journalism becoming more prevalent, the online news environment will see changes in the gatekeeping process (Shoemaker et al, 2009, pg. 79). Instead of journalists deciding what the public should know, journalists help the public understand the trove of information the Internet presents,

essentially combining the functions of investigative and interpretive journalism (Cassidy, 2006, pg. 11).

Another aspect to keep in mind is that with more journalists interacting with their audiences to gather feedback or using online social media tools and blogs for news-gathering purposes, a new set of guidelines and ethics are needed to set new professional standards (Nuno Vicente, 2013).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Galtung and Ruge (1965), in order for an event or series of events to be considered as news, they have to satisfy some criteria. Some of these criteria are frequency, relevance to the audience, cultural proximity to news organization reporting on the event, unexpectedness of the event, and unambiguity in that the interpretation of the event will clearly be negative or positive (Galtung & Ruge, 1965, pg. 70). Once deemed newsworthy, the facets of the event or events that make it newsworthy are highlighted. (pg. 71). However, in order to first become news on an international level, an event will have to easily capture attention, particularly if a country is distant geographically and culturally (pg. 81).

Parachute journalism is a necessary part of journalism today and acts as an “extension of local coverage,” (Erickson & Hamilton, 2006, pg. 44). Musa and Yusha’u define parachute journalism as having the following five characteristics:

1. Instantaneous reaction to a breaking news story in a location where the news media does not have a permanent presence.
2. Follows the tide in reporting to keep up with the competition for the story.
3. Has little room for follow-up stories because of budget cuts.
4. Focuses more on the immediate story than on context or social forces that are necessary to understand the story.

5. Heavy reliance on official sources (pg. 254).

By its very practice, parachute journalism has flaws that go against the role of the media “to spot potential crises, reduce evidential uncertainty and illuminate how an escalation of violence may matter before [emphasis in original] a conflict has fully erupted,” (Otto & Meyer, pg. 206). One of those flaws is that the stories produced by parachute journalists often give the audience an incomplete picture of the situation because the journalists themselves are not aware of it (Erickson & Hamilton, Palmer & Fontan).

Some other disadvantages of parachute reporting, which according to Musa and Yusha’u, cannot be overcome are:

1. Misunderstanding and therefore misreporting a conflict/crisis.
2. Inability to provide local context.
3. Lack of precision in ability to predict future possibilities.
4. Sometimes reporters are made part of the crisis when they appear to be taking sides.
5. Personal risk to journalists, especially those parachuted into the middle of a conflict.
6. Deeper scrutiny into situations is not possible by the journalist.
7. Problems that started off as small become major problems because journalists aren’t able to be watchdogs (pg. 264).

Erickson and Hamilton categorize foreign correspondents into five groups:

1. The traditional overseas foreign correspondent is permanently stationed abroad and works out of a bureau covering news in the region and, on occasion, regions further away from their headquarters.
2. The home-based foreign correspondent is a staff reporter who either has experience travelling/reporting abroad or is an expert on a particular region like Latin America or East Asia. They are then sent to where the story is, which may or may not be in the region where they have a level of expertise.
3. The beat reporter abroad is a reporter sent to a location because it pertains to a story on their beat. For example, religion reporters from the Chicago Tribune or the Boston Globe being sent to Rome to cover the death of Pope John Paul II, or a weather reporter going to Japan to report on their tsunami preparedness programs.
4. The vacationing reporter files stories from their holiday location. In some instances, it may so happen that breaking news occurs at the location and the vacationing reporter becomes a parachute journalist.
5. Embedded parachute journalists are those who are embedded into military units, political entourages, or with other groups going to a destination for a specific purpose (pgs. 37-43).

Another category is fixers, but these are described as “support systems” who take care of translation (if the journalist does not speak the local language), give the journalist a sense of the situation, contact sources for interviews and even

arrange for transportation during the journalist's stay (Erickson & Hamilton, 2006, pg. 40). Sometimes, these fixers are also local journalists who participate in the news production process, but don't get a byline for various reasons (Bishara, 2006).

In a case study of how foreign reporting became a part of two newspapers in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou, Guangzhou Daily and Southern Metro, Wang et al (2013) outlined an "exemplary" situation where the limitations of parachute journalism were demonstrated. On March 11, 2011, an undersea earthquake of 9.0 magnitude hit Japan, resulting in a tsunami and the deaths of 15,894 people. Seven newspapers from Guangzhou, China, sent 43 journalists to cover the disaster. A textual analysis of the earthquake coverage showed that the stories run by the papers were more about the reporters going to Japan, their "major actions" while in Japan and the reporters' return to China (Wang et al, 2013, pg. 895). For example, Guangzhou Daily ran a story headlined "Paralyzed Tokyo: GD Reporter Experiencing Transportation Chaos." Other stories from the journalists were "unorganized, fragmented, and generally detached from the broader context of the disaster" (pg. 896). According to Wang et al, the journalists who went to Japan to cover the earthquake did so without sufficient preparation and without understanding Japan's society and culture. Consequently, coverage of the earthquake was not "coherent and meaningful" (pg. 897).

Instead of focusing on increasing the number of foreign correspondents or bureaus, Otto and Meyer (2012) write that the focus for foreign news reporting should be:

1. To monitor developments in countries that are not just strategically important.
2. Cultivate the regional expertise reporters need to spot, understand and verify “warning signals.”
3. Effectively inform audiences on those warning signals that could be harmful, and why (pg. 217).

Alternative forms of journalism such as freelancers, stringers, blogs and social media sources challenge what are considered standard, professional practices of traditional journalism (Lăzăroiu, 2011, pg. 153). A journalist using alternate sources of information like blogs and social media sources “add another layer to the global information map” (Heinrich, 2012, pg. 771) and lead to the concept of network journalism. According to Heinrich, network journalism is using this information map to provide a “global outlook” on the coverage of world events (pg. 771). Heinrich cites two examples of how network journalism has been used recently. One is Andy Carvin’s use of Twitter to report on the Arab Spring from his desk at NPR’s offices. The other example Heinrich uses is the news source Global Voices, which is a community of bloggers from 167 countries that publishes curated stories as well as original articles.

In a survey of 124 journalists working in Sub-Saharan Africa, Nuno Vicente (2013) found that 54.84 percent of the journalists used online social networks for story ideas, as reporting and recording tools, to interact with audiences, to get news updates, and to get a sense of their competitors. In interviews with 25 foreign correspondents who had worked in London, Archetti (2013) found that the “information tide” resulting from the Internet has made it easy for the correspondents to find information, but the challenge lay in selecting which bit of information is relevant to “building an information skeleton” (pg. 427).

Foreign correspondence — and by extension, parachute journalism — is an “increasingly important information source for citizens,” (Van Leuven et al, 2015) and as such is not going to go away, even as its nature changes. It is then important to understand where the gaps in reporting come in between parachute journalists and local reporters of the country where the news event is taking place.

### **Research questions**

My first research question is based on the hypothesis that there is a significant difference in the topical coverage between local journalists in Nepal and foreign correspondents covering Nepal. Nepali papers do not need to contextualize every news article because their assumption may be their audience is already familiar with the situation on the ground. Local publications also provide daily coverage, as opposed to the sweeping view that many foreign journalists may have to provide. Additionally, a non-Nepali news article will have

to contextualize the event they are covering with the assumption that their readers are coming in with no prior knowledge of either the country, the news event being reported on, or both.

**RQ1: What is the difference in topical coverage between local journalists and all types of foreign correspondents?**

My second research question takes a look at sourcing patterns among the local and foreign reporters. Studies (Archetti, Nuno Vicente) have shown that the majority of foreign correspondents use the internet to find their sources while other studies (Paterson et al., Macdonald) have shown foreign correspondents relying on their own networks, fixers and officials for sources.

**RQ2: How do the two types of journalists differ in selecting from the available pools of sources?**

## METHODOLOGY

I selected Nepal as the subject for my qualitative textual analysis based on the following criteria:

1. A significant event or series of events (henceforth referred to as the linchpin) have taken place in Nepal since 2014 that has (or have) garnered enough global attention for news coverage from at least two internationally recognized news organizations like the Associated Press or the BBC.
2. It has at least one independent English language newspaper organization (active digitally or in print, or both).
3. It is a country that generally does not receive a lot of coverage from international news outlets.

Since the focus of the analysis is the political crisis, articles selected covered the beginning of the Madhesi protests, which started (based on best estimates) in August 2015, through the end of the calendar year (Dec. 31, 2015). A total of 50 English-language news articles from three publications were examined in the analysis. The publications were selected based on who had the highest number of articles according to ProQuest Newsstand.

The articles were coded on the following criteria:

1. Theme/Event framing: political, economic.

Which theme is used to structure the story? The political theme includes articles related to the constitution and its changes, and the situation with

the Madhesis. The economic theme relates to India's blockade, the resulting crisis and the political back-and-forth that ensued both in India and Nepal.

2. Topics: constitution related, blockade consequences (economic or otherwise), conflict with Madhesis, other. Some articles touched on one or more of these topics. Some articles focus solely on communal clashes, or solely on earthquake relief efforts, or just on debates between the politicians on changes related to the constitution. Each topic in an article was coded depending on the number of paragraphs devoted to it.

3. Type of correspondent.

Is the author of the article a local Nepali journalist writing for a local Nepali newspaper? A freelancer? Or do they fall under one of the five categories of foreign correspondents described earlier?

Kolbe and Burnett (1991) define a content analysis as "an observational research method that is used to systematically evaluate the symbolic content of all forms of recorded communication," (pg. 243). The study goes on to briefly describe the strengths and weaknesses of content analyses. The strengths are:

1. Allowing for discreet evaluations of communications.
2. Assess "effects of environmental variables" and how the content affects the receivers.
3. Provides a "starting point" for further research.
4. Can be used in conjunction with other research methods.

The weaknesses of content analyses, according to Kolbe and Burnett (pg. 244) are:

1. Open to the researcher's bias.
2. Limited to analyses of certain elements in communications.
3. Data from content analyses are categorical in nature (pg. 244).

A facet of content analysis that also needs to be looked at in some detail is sampling, which is the method by which data is collected. According to Lacy et al, true probabilistic sampling in the age of the internet is difficult, at best. "The requirement that all units in a population have equal odds of being selected obviously becomes problematic if it is impossible to identify what constitutes a population," (pg. 793). One way for researchers to combat the limitations posed by the inherent platform for archiving material is to be aware the limitation exists, and by removing selection bias. Another way to get the most out of the sample frame is to add "content validity (represent different facets of the same concept)" to the search for a sample (pg. 794).

With this in mind, to gather the texts for this analysis, every fifth article per publication from the search result list was selected. If the article was an opinion piece or editorial, the article before it was selected. If the prior article is also an op-ed or editorial, the article immediately after the intended original was selected.

For example, while selecting articles from The Kathmandu Post, the 90th article in the search list was an op-ed published on Aug. 19, 2015. The 89th article

was also an op-ed published the same day. Therefore, the 91st article was selected to include in the analysis.

While selecting articles from The Hindu, Wall Street Journal and Asia News Monitor, an additional filter was used. The initial search was narrowed by using the “location” filter.

From Asia News Monitor, five articles were excluded from the 23 search results, leading to only 18 articles being selected from this publication. The five excluded articles were spokesperson statements and reports from the International Monetary Fund and Human Rights Watch.

Of the 14 articles published in the Wall Street Journal within the date range, five items were excluded: four “What’s News: World-Wide” and one photo gallery.

The interviews with the journalists were conducted over Skype between October and November 2016. Each interview lasted between 20 minutes to an hour. The journalists were selected from bylines in the textual analysis sample.

### **Conducting the analysis**

Data from each of the articles was recorded in a database created in Microsoft Excel. The column headers are: article number, publication, headline, type of correspondent, themes (political, economic), total number of paragraphs in the article as demarcated on ProQuest Newsstand, the topics (constitution related, blockade consequences, conflict with Madhesis, negotiations/meetings/deals/talks

by and with political parties, other) and the sources (Nepali prime minister/prime minister's office, political leaders in Kathmandu, regional Madhesi political leaders, political group activist leaders, political group activists, activists, subject experts, regular citizens/man on the street, foreign politicians, other).

Under each descriptive element (theme, topic, sources), the number of paragraphs that relate to that element were recorded. If a paragraph could be coded under two topics, then the paragraph was counted twice, once for each topic.

The sources were coded by actual number of sources used, not the number of paragraphs used to quote sources. For example, if in a story there were eight citizens spoken to and one citizen was quoted in two paragraphs, that person would only be counted once.

## **CHANGES TO ORIGINAL PROPOSAL**

The project had been designed for a quantitative content analysis. However, after a change in committee and subsequent review of the proposal, it was decided that a qualitative textual analysis supplemented by interviews would yield more definitive results.

Two other changes were made. The number of articles to be coded were reduced and interviews with journalists whose bylines appeared in the articles were also to be included.

## RESEARCH MATERIALS

### Articles from The Hindu

#### **'Not a celebratory moment for India'**

As celebrations broke out in Nepal over the adoption of the new democratic secular Constitution, India responded with an angry statement, pointing to the protests in the Terai against the Constitution.

A statement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs said that India is "concerned that the situation in several parts of the country bordering India continues to be violent."

"We urge that issues on which there are differences should be resolved through dialogue in an atmosphere free from violence and intimidation, and institutionalised in a manner that would enable broad-based ownership and acceptance," it added, in the sharpest comment by India yet.

India also referred to the new document as "a Constitution" as opposed to "the Constitution," leading to speculation that India still hopes for amendments which would correct what it sees as a marginalisation of the people in the Terai region.

Confirming that this is not a "celebratory moment" for India, senior diplomats said that the new Constitution was "just not good enough to address all concerns" of the Madhesi and Tharu people. India's ambassador Ranjit Rae also telephoned Prime Minister Sushil Koirala hours before the Constitution ceremony to express India's disappointment that it was going through in its current form. Nepal's refusal to extend the

date for the Constitution despite PM Modi sending Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar with an appeal on Friday has come as a blow.

"This could cause a strain in India-Nepal ties," a senior official admitted to The Hindu , pointing out that none of the major Madhesi parties have signed the Constitution that was presented for ratification last week.

Three main problems

According to the government, there are three major problems with the Constitution which prevents India from warmly welcoming the document. To begin with the federal-provincial demarcation is perceived to be unfair to the people of the Terai region; secondly, the constituency delimitation is skewed against the Madhes population as half the population, that is the Pahadi (Hill) community gets 100 seats but the other half consisting of the Madhesi and the Janjatis get only 65 seats.

Finally the 'proportional inclusion' clause, for reservation includes many forward castes of the Pahadi region, which negates the principle of affirmative action, officials said. India also feels let down that many of the commitments given by Nepal during the framing of the 2007 interim Constitution have been forgotten.

The interim Constitution was based on an understanding that the Maoists and the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) which would ensure inclusiveness and just representation of the traditional elite of the Kathmandu valley and their martial military class of the mountains as well as the large Madhesi and Janjati population of the Terai region, they say. However India's anger and continuing incidents of violence indicate Madhesi parties

are far from convinced this Constitution is inclusive.

### **Envoy called for consultations**

On Monday, police in Birgunj said three protesters were seriously injured when police opened fire on activists demanding greater representation for Madhesis in the new Constitution.

In other towns of Southern Nepal, including Biratnagar and Janakpur, several protests were reported, where copies of the Constitution promulgated on Sunday were burnt. Since August 25, when clashes with the police first began over the Constitution, at least 40 people have been killed, mostly protesters, and including 8 policemen, who were lynched.

But India's concerns aren't limited to just the fear of violence spreading to parts of Bihar. Since 2007, when the Seven Party alliance (SPA) had first signed on to the Constitution-building process, India has been a key influence, even playing guarantor for many of the parties.

Officials say none of the commitments given by the Nepal government then on representation and rights of the Madhesi people were kept when the Constitution was finalised, and India feels slighted by this. "The statements we have issued are a symbol of the frustration the government feels," an official told The Hindu .

Moreover, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has invested considerable personal stock in ties with Nepal, a country he has travelled through extensively in the past. On both visits to Nepal as Prime Minister, Mr. Modi had made a point of discussing the

Constitution-building process, and in November 2014, publicly counselled the government to seek "consensus, not numbers [majority]."

On August 25, when it became clear that Nepal's government was going ahead with a majority vote for the Constitution, and violence broke out, Mr. Modi even made a telephone call to his counterpart Koirala. According to an MEA statement issued at the time, Mr. Modi had told him that the Nepal leadership "should resolve all outstanding issues through dialogue between all political parties and through the process of widest possible consultation."

India's messages to Nepal have become less polite and more public, with statements expressing concern, sans any note of congratulations on the Constitution being adopted.

### **India calls Ambassador back for consultations**

Caution on Nepal statute ignored, says MEA.

"Deeply concerned" over the continuing violence in Nepal, and the impact of Kathmandu's decision to adopt the new Constitution despite India's advice, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Monday called Indian Ambassador to Nepal Ranjit Rae back to Delhi for consultations.

In its third and most stern statement in three days on the situation in Nepal, the MEA said it had "repeatedly cautioned the political leadership of Nepal to take urgent steps to defuse the tension in [the Terai] region." "This, if [it had been] done in a timely manner, could have averted these serious developments," the statement added, referring to the clashes between Madhesi protesters and Nepali forces, as well as the impact on

Indian transporters who have been stuck at the Biratnagar integrated border checkpost because of the violence.

The Ambassador's visit and MEA statement come a day after Nepal promulgated its Constitution. India has refused to welcome it, with officials saying that the decision had "put a strain" on bilateral ties.

Meanwhile, Nepal's Ambassador to India Deep Kumar Upadhyay told The Hindu that he was "completely surprised" by the Indian reaction. "On a day when Nepal was celebrating, India didn't join in with us. That surprised us. I wish they had taken us into confidence about their reservations earlier," Mr. Upadhyay said, adding that Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar's mission to Nepal last Friday, just before Sunday's ceremony "came too late."

"We hope India realises this Constitution is just the beginning, a starting point from which we can move ahead to resolve our differences," he said. India says it has expressed its concerns to Nepal's government because of a possible "spill-over" of violence to the districts of Bihar bordering Nepal.

### **Blame game on between India and Nepal as trucks pile up**

The diplomatic confrontation between India and Nepal over its new Constitution has turned into a blame game over the pile-up of trucks carrying goods into Nepal at three critical checkpoints along the border.

According to a local customs association, about 1,500 trucks laden with fuel, civil supplies and essential foods have been held up since Wednesday on the Indian side, as Madhesi groups protesting against what they call an unjust Constitution have refused to

let truck traffic move at all the major checkpoints, including Birgunj, Biratnagar and Nepalgunj.

The government denies there was any move to delay goods flowing into Nepal. "India has conveyed in no uncertain terms that there is no blockade from the Indian side," a senior official told The Hindu . "But we are unable to control what is happening on the Nepali side of the border, and the prevailing situation is leading to obstructions in trucks going through."

On Friday, the Nepal government had called in Ambassador Ranjit Rae to ask him to explain the "obstructions" in supplies from India. The meeting was the second between the Indian Ambassador and senior Nepalese officials since India registered a strong protest over the adoption of a Constitution which it feels disregards the Terai region.

India retorted with another statement on Friday, telling Nepal to look at root causes of the protests, calling the issues "political in nature." Nepal's PM Sushil Koirala, who rejected India's plea to postpone the Constitution, has tried to reach out some of the Madhesi leadership in the past few days. On Saturday, he travelled to Tikapur, where the first flare-up over the Constitution occurred in August, to discuss measures to calm the violence.

On Saturday, reports came in from Kathmandu and other major towns across the country of people lining up to fill up on fuel and stock up supplies, as fears spread of an economic blockade like the one imposed by India for 13 months in 1989 as relations between then PM Rajiv Gandhi and then King Birendra had led to the lapse of a transit trade agreement between them. "While the fears may be similar, there is a vast difference

between 1989 and 2015," noted Nepal-expert and Professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, SD Muni told The Hindu .

"In 1989 it was a bilateral problem that had caused the crisis. This time, the problem involves India, and people inside Nepal, so it is much more complicated."

### **Nepal's growing divide**

As beleaguered Madhesis and their opponents from other communities pelted stones at each other at Bhairahawa in Nepal's Terai region recently, it seemed the violence that had already taken 40 lives in the ongoing protests is not about to end any time soon.

Indeed, this latest skirmish only underscored the growing divide within Nepali society that has implications for India: the Hindi-speaking Madhesis, who inhabit the flat southern region of the country bordering India, and constitute 31 per cent of the whole population, have been agitating for a proportionate share in political participation and governance to be enshrined in the country's newly adopted Constitution.

If the agitators have accused the Nepal government of ignoring the aspirations and sensibilities of the Madheshis, Janajatis, Dalits and women, the dominant communities from the hills, have started targeting the protesters, accusing them of being "Indian agents".

The new Constitution has failed to address the demands of Madhesis, Tharus and other minorities, former Nepali Ambassador to Denmark, Vijay Kant Karna, told The Hindu . "The basic structure of the ruling class in Nepal is that, at the most, 150 families control the whole system."

Mr. Karna, who currently teaches at Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, and is

part of the core group espousing the Madhesi cause, added: "It is a fight by the marginalised to get their fair share, but those at the helm do not wish to devolve power."

The promise for an autonomous region of Madhesh was not kept despite repeated protests in the second Constituent Assembly, the new Constitution was adopted, he said. The current agitation has not only claimed many lives but also disrupted the supply of basic essentials, including fuel, from India. "Fuel stations will soon dry up. All essential items come through the Terai region," Krishna, an anxious hill resident of Irkhu, told The Hindu .

The Madhesis have also demanded recognition of Hindi as a link/official language in their province, and proportionate representation in government, in which it currently has only eight per cent, mostly in the middle and lower categories.

### **India hopes for better ties, as Nepal begins crucial transition**

In a valedictory speech to the Nepal assembly on Friday, Prime Minister Sushil Koirala announced he would ask President Ram Baran Yadav to begin the process of electing a new Prime Minister to lead the country after it had adopted the Constitution on September 20.

The announcement was expected as, according to the constitutional framework, a new government is due to be elected within "a week of the beginning of the first session of the House after the commencement of the new charter", which was held on Friday. This means that the new government could be in place by October 9, if there is consensus over its choice.

"I had taken up the prime ministerial post with the responsibility to help the task

of promulgation of Constitution from the Constituent Assembly in all ways," said Mr. Koirala, who was elected as the country's PM in February 2014. "Also, I had made public commitment to give up the positional responsibilities after the promulgation of Constitution."

Significantly, PM Koirala didn't announce his resignation, nor has he indicated who the next Prime Minister will be, giving many in the Indian foreign policy establishment the hope that the new prime minister will be one more favourably disposed to India than the current PM-designate K.P. Oli. It had been widely expected that the Constitution had been cleared after a "deal" that Mr. Oli, who heads the Communist Party (Unified-Marxist- Leninist), or UML, would become the consensus candidate for PM.

But in the past few days, Mr. Oli has made several statements criticising India for what he calls a "blockade" at the India-Nepal border, even accusing India of "violating international law". While India has denied the charge, the allegations haven't gone away, and officials in New Delhi would have a harder time repairing relations with its neighbour with Mr. Oli at the helm.

There is even the hope that PM Koirala, who, despite all the tensions with India over the constitution and violence in the Terai has maintained good relations with the Narendra Modi government, will be re-elected as PM, or one of his other senior party members of the Nepali Congress would take the post.

### **Keep off Nepal affairs, diplomat tells India**

A senior Nepali diplomat based in Kolkata, rather uncharacteristically, issued a veiled threat to India on Friday, stating that his country "would not hesitate to update the

bigger powers in the region about the situation" if Delhi kept mounting pressure on Kathmandu.

He was responding to a question about the present imbroglio related to the drafting of the country's Constitution. The diplomat's allusion to China, in language couched in diplomatic jargon, is an obvious warning to India.

In a one-to-one conversation with *The Hindu*, the diplomat, who spoke on strict condition of anonymity, said that the country's ruling class was "exceptionally united" in spite of differences among a wide spectrum of political parties.

Perhaps this is the first time that a Nepali diplomat has used such strong language against India, at the same time hinting at the possibility of his country sending feelers to the super power in the region, China. Interestingly, even Indian policy framers agree that Nepal has reasons to be upset with India.

The diplomat, who has spent quite a long time in Kolkata, said that the relations between the two countries were deteriorating "by the hour" as Delhi was showing "no remorse."

"It was only a few months back that India was so much respected for its role in earthquake-related relief and rehabilitation in Nepal. But now, Indian [television] channels are spontaneously blacked out, the effigy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is burnt in public, and no one from India is welcome in the country," the diplomat said. "I personally am so fond of India, and so many of us are so fond of India. In so many ways, we are so dependent on India, and the relationship between the countries was so smooth and cordial. I really wonder who provoked India to turn it into a foreign policy nightmare

for no reason at all," he regretted.

The problem started on September 20 when the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) issued a lukewarm response to the promulgation of "a Constitution", which was negotiated for nearly a decade. According to news reports in both the countries, Delhi proposed that the Madhesis, who constitute one-third of Nepal's population, be accorded full citizenship and representation in the government and the security establishment.

Nepal refused to accept the proposal, arguing that "naturalised citizens" were not allowed to head the government or security establishments. Eventually, the supply of goods from India to Nepal, including household items and fuel, was stopped. It is unclear if the movement of goods was officially stopped by India or by transporters owing to the disturbances on the border.

"India has chosen to speak for one community [Madhesis] and for seven or eight districts of Nepal, when the country has 75. Will you accept it if the United States chooses to speak to Bengalis or Tamils only, and only interact with one or two States of the country?" the diplomat asked. "We feel India should have had a comprehensive Nepal policy, rather than a 'Madheshi only' policy. It cannot be acceptable to any sovereign country, and so, it is not acceptable to us," he said.

Without naming China, he reiterated twice that India was "creating space for someone else" in the region by intervening in his country's Constitution drafting process. An overwhelming majority in Nepal's Parliament -- the members of the Constituent Assembly -- drafted the country's Constitution last month.

Even Indian experts, who monitor the neighbourhood from Kolkata, said that

instead of intervening in Nepal's policy-framing, India should have "encouraged" that country to successfully complete the democratic process. "Nepal is a sovereign state, and it deserves appreciation for the success in consolidating the democratic policies and processes. Their Constitution has been framed after extensive consultations and has been a pretty long-drawn-out affair, leveraging global experience. Frankly, we in South Asia should applaud their decision of proportional representation and reservation of 33% seats for women in Parliament," said Ashok Dhar, Director of Observer Research Foundation, Kolkata.

Academics, traders and policy experts, who attended a discussion on the subject earlier this week, unanimously said that India should lift the embargo, if any, on transportation of goods and "work overtime to restore normal diplomatic relationship" with Nepal at the earliest.

Kathmandu may talk to 'super power in the region' if pressure by Delhi continues.

### **Fresh blow to hopes of settlement to Nepal statute controversy**

India has denied that it has issued any order for a "blockade" at the Indo-Nepal border that has seen over 2,000 trucks parked on the Indian side waiting to go in. Hundreds of Indian truckers have been stranded in Nepal as well, as protesters angry with the new Constitution adopted by Nepal have blocked the crossing-points to pressure the government in Kathmandu.

Asked about India's denial, Nepali Ambassador Deep Kumar Upadhyay told The Hindu on Sunday that Nepal offered Indian trucks a guarantee of safe passage despite the protests.

"We have furnished all kinds of assurances of foolproof security to the government, we will escort every truck once it enters Nepal, so what is the problem," he asked. "The Indian government should see what is stopping the trucks from leaving India."

Hopes of a settlement over the Constitution were dealt another blow on Sunday, when parliament was adjourned and failed to pass two crucial amendments introduced by Prime Minister Sushil Koirala to assuage the Madhesi demands over constituency delineation and proportional inclusion.

As a result, the amendments -- that India had hoped for -- now hang in the balance, and may be delayed further as parliament now begins the process of electing a new Prime Minister.

The ambassador's strong remarks that India should not push Nepalis to the wall indicate a toughening of position in Kathmandu, even as he said Nepal would have to look for other options like China to resolve the fuel crisis and shortage of essentials. "We know this is impractical and we can't afford the cost, but we are being left with no options," he said.

### **Traders worried as cargo piles up in Kolkata**

Nepalese importers say situation is fast moving "from bad to worse"

Nepal-bound cargo is piling up in the Kolkata port while clearing and forwarding (C&F) agents, third party exporters and traders between the two neighbours are concerned over the near-stagnation of the movement of consumables.

The diplomatic confrontation between India and Nepal over the latter's new

Constitution has turned into a blame game over the pile-up of trucks carrying goods into Nepal at three critical checkpoints along the border.

The C &F agents have told The Hindu that more than 2,000 containers are lying on the Kolkata port compound and cannot move to the border areas as the movement of goods is "not picking up." At least 4,000 to 5,000 containers are stranded in various entry points on the border, the C &F agents association said.

However, some of the stalled vehicles have moved over last 24 hours. Over 200 vehicles ferrying food and consumer goods and 22 fuel containers have crossed over to Nepal till Sunday afternoon, while 34 fuel carriers still await customs clearance.

Sixty-two vehicles loaded with cargo crossed the Panitanki-Kakarbhitta point along the India-Nepal border on Saturday, three of which carried third country imports. Till Sunday noon, 28 vehicles crossed the border at this point with an additional 142 vehicles crossing Bhairawa-Sunauli point on the same day. The Bhairawa-Sunauli crossing registered 42 vehicles with consumer and food items early on Sunday.

Additionally, a total of 16 LPG-loaded vehicles moved north through the Nepalgunj entry point in Bahraich district, Uttar Pradesh. Only 6 fuel tankers, including two LPG carrying vehicles, managed to enter Nepal at the Bhairawa-Sunauli crossing on Saturday.

However, top Nepalese importers told The Hindu that the situation was fast moving "from bad to worse" due to lack of fuel. "Hospitals, schools, government institutions are all shutting down and this is due to lack of petroleum products which mainly come from India," said an importer, who made a huge loss over the last few days.

Various associations of C &F agents in Kolkata are also incurring huge losses as the Nepal-bound goods are piling up in the Kolkata port.

One of the agents, who recently visited Nepal to have a word with the importers, said, they were "feeling nervous" about the mounting losses.

### **'Nepal will look outside if crisis does not end'**

India sees no merit in Nepal's complaints that it was being "choked" and deprived of essential supplies amid continuing trouble in the Himalayan state over its Constitution which is regarded here as "rigid."

Nepal's Ambassador here -- Deep Kumar Upadhyay -- again spoke of an Indian blockade of his country, which he claimed, was being denied of essential supplies such as petroleum products by India, a charge dismissed by New Delhi.

India maintains that the concerns of Indian-origin Madhesi population about the new Nepal Constitution were legitimate and needed to be addressed now. Commenting on the crisis, Mr. Upadhyay said, "When we are asked what if the blockade does not end...then we say that we have to look at the world outside. Our priority would be restoring normalcy with the help of the Indian government."

Meanwhile, India is in consultations with other countries and groupings like the European Union over the crisis in the Himalayan nation.

### **Nepal's crisis is an outcome of its internal discord: India**

India on Thursday tore into Nepal's promise to provide security to Indian truckers, and said the blockade on the border and the resultant fuel crisis are prompted by a section of the Nepalis.

"Indian Oil Corporation was unable to transport fuel on October 7 due to border obstruction on the Nepali side. The obstruction is due to the fact that a part of the population is not happy with the Constitution that Nepal has passed recently and they are asking for changes in that Constitution," said Vikas Swarup, Spokesperson of the External Affairs Ministry.

Earlier, Nepal's Ambassador Deep Kumar Upadhyay had told The Hindu that Nepal had given guarantees of physical safety to the truckers. "We have furnished all kinds of assurances of foolproof security to the government. We will escort every truck once it enters Nepal. So where is the problem?"

But Thursday's verbal outpouring by Mr. Swarup shows that bilateral ties are not moving ahead. Swarup indicated that the blockade against the movement of trucks carrying commodities and petroleum products will continue until a political solution is found to the disaffection and alienation of the Madhesi people who share deep cultural links with India.

The verbal spat and the blockade have nearly wrecked the BBIN (Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal) Motor Vehicles Agreement, which was perceived to be an initiative of the Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar.

India, which was the leading player in the BBIN initiative, showcased the agreement as a sign of SAARC moving forward without Pakistan. Devi Prasad Tripathi of Nationalist Congress Party, who played a key role in firming up the Nepal-India ties since the arrival of the NDA government in May 2014, told The Hindu that India's fight with Nepal is hurting the image of India as a South Asian power.

"Ever since the NDA came to power, we pushed for a consensus-based Constitution in Nepal. We also pushed the Nepali political parties to come closer and resolve their differences. We know that the Constitution does not satisfy all sides. But they can improve upon it later. We should act in a mature manner and give Nepal the space that it needs to sort its own domestic affairs."

### **'Harsh measures could lead to starvation deaths in Nepal'**

Do not penalise the vast majority of people in Nepal for kinks in the newly-formed Constitution, said Binod Pahadi, former Member of Parliament and Dalit leader of Nepal.

Mr. Pahadi, who delivered the 5<sup>th</sup> S.R. Sankaran Memorial Lecture on the Constitution of Nepal and Dalits under the aegis of Centre for Dalit Studies, a non-governmental organisation, on Saturday, said that though parts of Nepal's Constitution is representative of upper caste lawmakers, India's action should not penalise Dalits and other downtrodden communities in that country.

Most of those suffering under the burden of unofficial road blockades are the downtrodden in Nepal, he stressed. The high and mighty in Nepal are unaffected by India's measures, Mr. Pahadi reiterated. Nepal is edging towards a Dalit political solidarity, he confirmed. "Dalit leaders across political parties will come together to oppose anti-caste clauses in the Constitution. We expect the Indian leadership to support this cause," he said.

Mr. Pahadi, who is also associated with the Jagaran Media Centre, an organisation which has been rallying for freedom of the press and democratic rights, said the new

Constitution allows 13 per cent reservation of Dalits and representation of the community in the national Parliament.

"When it comes to certain parts of the Constitution which deals with the rights of men and women of certain marginalised sections, the Constitution has remained a Brahmin entity. While India should guide the lawmakers, those in power should realise that rash and harsh measures could lead to starvation deaths in Nepal," he said. The landlocked country is highly dependent on India for food and oil imports.

Currently, protesters in Nepal are demanding the implementation of reservation based on population density. Nepal should emulate the Indian model of affirmative action, he said.

### **Veteran communist elected Nepal PM**

Political turbulence in Nepal appears to be far from over despite the election of veteran communist leader K.P. Sharma Oli on Sunday as the country's first Prime Minister under the newly introduced constitutional system. Speaking to The Hindu from Janakpur, Rajendra Mahato, the leader of Nepal Sadbhavna Party (the leading constituent of the Madhesi front), lashed out at Mr. Oli for his alleged "anti-Terai" bias. "Mr. Oli is a known opponent of the rights of the people of Terai. We will intensify our protests in twenty districts of the Terai region protesting his premiership."

In a tense election, Mr. Oli -- of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) -- secured 338 votes out of a total of 598. He defeated incumbent Prime Minister Sushil Koirala of the Nepali Congress.

Nail-biting election

The election had its nail-biting moments when the Madhesi parties, which had earlier boycotted the proceedings, rushed back into the Parliament to block the election of Mr. Oli. But at the last moment, some Madhesi lawmakers broke ranks with the pro-blockade leaders of their front and voted for Mr. Oli.

The upset Madhesi leadership has termed the veteran communist's election a hasty action that should not have taken place without first addressing the anxiety of the Madhesh region. "Madhesi leaders in the Parliament have been under continuous physical and verbal attack over the last few days prior to the actual voting inside the Parliament on October 10," Mr. Mahato said.

Mr. Oli, meanwhile, received a congratulatory phone call from Prime Minister Narendra Modi. India received emissaries in the past week from the new Nepal PM, who tried to convince that once in power he would be willing to address New Delhi's concerns about the blockade. Officials have told The Hindu that India conveyed to Mr. Oli that it wished to see progress in talks between the Madhesi parties and the government of Nepal, and constitutional amendments that address Madhesi grievances.

On the ground, however, intimidation and violence against Madhesi leaders allegedly continue. Mr. Mahato told The Hindu that many of his fellow leaders have been intimidated in Kathmandu over the last few days. "Mobs have been stoning my house for the last several days we have been saved from firebombs by the presence of the police. It is common knowledge that Madhesi leaders are being targeted for demanding their rights under the new Nepali Constitution."

Mr. Mahato, who is leading protests in several districts, has been holding out in Janakpuri. He said he was committed to keep the blockade on till Kathmandu gives in. But Nepali diplomatic sources have told The Hindu that if the situation persists, it is going to jeopardise the already fragile situation.

"The new Prime Minister has taken over and the immediate issue on his agenda is to ensure clear supply lines for the essential goods like kerosene. Already a dialogue committee has been created between the government and the Madhesi parties, which addresses India's official concerns. We shall request the Madhesi parties to at least make a temporary opening in the blockade due to the Vijaya Dashami festival ahead," Nepal's Ambassador to India, Deep Kumar Upadhyay, told The Hindu.

Mr. Oli is a known opponent of the rights of the people of Terai. We will intensify our protests against his premiership

- Rajendra Mahato, Madhesi front leader

**'Will serve Nepal again if parties want'**

Breaking his silence on the raging turmoil in Nepal, President Ram Baran Yadav told The Hindu on Wednesday that proper representation has to be ensured to all communities and territorial regions of Nepal if internal order and harmony is to be restored.

"Nepal needs a representative government. I will serve Nepal once again if the country and the political parties demand me to become President. I am ready to shoulder any responsibility for Nepal as I have done in the past," Dr. Yadav said in an interaction at his official residence Sheetal Bhavan.

Nepal's Parliament is going to elect a new President on October 27 and political heat is rising as various options and personalities are being examined by the political class. Dr. Yadav, who has served for seven years as President, has remained silent on the latest blockade but he feels there is no point in brushing the problems of the Madhesis under the carpet.

Nepali political leaders have told The Hindu that there is a growing understanding that since the post of Prime Minister has gone to K.P. Sharma Oli, a Pahari Brahmin, the post of President should go to a Madhesi leader. Therefore, the name of Dr. Yadav has returned to the forefront.

Answering a pointed question whether he would like to be a candidate in the coming election for president, Dr. Yadav said it was for the political parties in Parliament to decide. "I hope the political parties have their ears to the ground and make a decision that will help Nepal's future. I am not saying that I should be the President. But a Madhesi can be chosen to maintain balance and order in the country," he said.

But it is not easy for Dr. Yadav to become a President again as the Madhesis themselves are becoming more aggressive in their demands. While leaders like Rajendra Mahato believe the present government has taken away the right of citizenship from the Madhesis, Dr. Yadav reportedly disagrees and considers the careless division of the Madhesi region to be a greater problem for his people. But more importantly, to have someone to represent their region in the Nepali system, the divided Madhesi political parties also need to come together. Reflecting on the possibility of finding a Madhesi leader, Mr. Mahato told The Hindu that he and his party Sadbhawna Party would consider

all options in case a Madhesi candidate came up. Nepal's politics is in a fractured state but it remains to be seen if the divides of Nepal can be bridged by the cross party moves of Mr. Sharma Oli or by those like Mr. Ram Baran Yadav who want Nepal to become more representative. The presidential election will be a test of political acumen of Parliament.

### **China confirms sending fuel to Nepal**

China on Thursday confirmed it was sending fuel supplies to Nepal, breaking India's monopoly on the export of petroleum products to the Himalayan nation.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said in his regular media briefing that in response to a request from the Nepali side, "the Chinese government decided to supply Nepal with a certain amount of emergency fuel assistance so as to help Nepal to tide over its fuel shortage".

The spokesman also signalled that China could well become a long-term fuel supplier to Nepal, undercutting Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), which had been the sole supplier of fuel to Nepal for four decades. "A working group of Nepal also visited China. They had discussions with relevant authorities in China on the trade of oil products," Mr. Lu said.

Analysts point out that India's de facto embargo on oil supplies to Nepal, following the adoption of a new Constitution, in which the Indian origin Madhesis appeared poorly represented, had imparted fresh urgency in Kathmandu to seek China as an alternative energy supplier.

Highly placed sources in Nepal told The Hindu that the request to China for

supplies was routed through Narayan Kaji Shrestha, the Vice-Chairman of the ruling UCPN (Maoist) during his visit, earlier this month, to Beijing where he attended a conference on the revival of the Silk Road.

On Wednesday, Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) and China National United Oil Corporation (PetroChina) had signed an agreement on the supply of petroleum products to Nepal. The agreement is meant to ease short-term fuel shortages in Nepal. But The Kathmandu Post quoted NOC spokesperson Deepak Baral as saying: "A larger business-to-business agreement will be signed between the two state-owned oil companies within one- and-a-half month."

Separately, China has also agreed to grant 1.2 million litres of fuel to Nepal to alleviate immediate energy shortfall. Local media reports in Nepal say that on Saturday, NOC would send 12 fuel tankers at the Kerung- Rasuwagadhi border point to receive Chinese fuel. Mr. Baral, the NOC spokesman, was quoted as saying the Chinese authorities would oversee issues related to insurance, transport and labour laws once the tankers enter the Chinese soil.

In a conversation with The Hindu , Santosh Ghimire, a Kathmandu-based journalist, pointed out that Nepal's engagement with China on energy security should not be viewed as an anti-India move. On the contrary, "a new generation in Nepal is keen to establish a trilateral partnership with India and China as part of a more evenly balanced foreign policy".

The fuel deal with Nepal feeds into China's broader strategic perspective, with Kathmandu as one of the nodes of the Beijing-led Belt and Road connectivity initiative

that would integrate the economies of Eurasia. Nepal and China have inked a four-point document endorsing the Belt and Road initiative.

A working group of Nepal also visited China. They had discussions with relevant authorities in China on the trade of oil products.

### **Avoid outside interference, China tells crisis-hit Nepal**

China on Wednesday called on Nepal government and parties to resolve the differences over the new Constitution without "outside interference", a veiled reference to India amid ongoing agitation in the country by Indian-origin Madhesis.

"China is closely following the situation in Nepal," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said, when asked about a police firing on protestors during anti-Constitution stir in Nepal in which one Indian was killed.

"We hope that the Nepali government and all relevant parties will bear in mind national unity, social stability and fundamental interests of people in Nepal," she said, asking the Nepal government and other political parties to properly address their differences.

"Properly resolve differences through consultations in a peaceful manner with no interference from outside, restore stability back to Nepal as soon as possible and stay committed to post disaster reconstruction and long- term development of Nepal," she said. Ever since the crisis erupted in Nepal over Madhesis protesting over the new Constitution, China has opened its borders with Nepal in Tibet which was closed and sent some supplies of fuel to ease shortage hit by protesters blockade on the Indian border.

China National United Oil Corp has also signed an agreement with Nepal Oil Corp for supplying fuel.

Beijing also said it is willing to have friendly consultations with India to work out consensus to address Nepal's constitutional crisis.

Another Foreign Ministry spokesman, Lu Kang told media here on Octobr 28 that "both India and Nepal are friendly neighbours to China".

"We hope that in maintaining regional stability and state--to state friendship all relevant counties can sit together and have friendly consultations so that consensus can be reached."

### **Protests during Modi's first day in the U.K.**

As the first day of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to London got off to a business like start on Thursday, it was a different mood that prevailed on the street outside 10 Downing Street, the British Prime Minister's official residence, and later in Parliament Square.

On a grey and overcast morning, angry protestors gathered carrying banners, placards and flags which highlighted the increasing number of incidents of intolerance in India against the freedom of speech and writing and the rights of minorities. Angry protestors raised anti-Modi slogans, which for a time were met in equal measure by a group of pro-Modi agitators who gathered on the opposite side of the road.

Drawn from organisations like the South Asia Solidarity Forum, Awaaz and the Nepal People's Coordination Committee, over a thousand people faced-off the group of Modi as policemen in high visibility jackets stood between the two camps.

"I don't belong to any particular group but came here because I felt that I needed to protest against Mr. Modi who is anti-intellectual and anti-secular, " said Gina Sargunar from Bristol.

Former Bradford Member of Parliament and Respect leader George Galloway was among the protestors. "Mr. Modi is Prime Minister of a great country, though he is not a great Prime Minister" he said.

Demonstrators from Nepal participated in large numbers, demanding an end to the economic blockade of Nepal. "Mr. Modi does not want Nepal to have its Constitution," said Bigyan Prasai, an office bearer of the NPCC. "We are in another humanitarian crisis after the earthquake, with the blockade cutting essential supplies, including to hospitals."

By mid-morning, the group of pro-Modi demonstrators had melted away, even as the numbers swelled on the other side. "We want to welcome Modi to the UK," said Shailesh Shedbale, a financial consultant who had come to the venue with his colleague Sachin Jadhav. Both said they were impressed with Mr. Modi's leadership, especially his "make in India" slogan. They also hope that in this visit Mr. Modi would hear their demand for voting rights for non-resident Indians.

Open letter

Two hundred British writers from PEN international wrote to the British Prime Minister asking him to use the platform to discuss the human rights situation with Mr. Modi. On Wednesday a large group of senior academics from British universities published an open letter in The Guardian expressing much the same sentiment.

**Fresh row breaks out as Nepal detains 13 Indian border guards**

India-Nepal ties hit another flashpoint on Sunday after 13 personnel of the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) were detained by the Nepal Armed Police Force (APF) in Jhapa (Nepal).

They were released after several hours in custody.

While India contended that only two of the personnel, who were unarmed, had inadvertently crossed the border while chasing 'smugglers', and 11 had followed to negotiate their release, Nepali officials accused them of carrying weapons without permission into civilian areas. "The police did not arrest them first. They were captured and disarmed by the locals themselves who then called us to come and arrest the Indian SSB guards," Thakur Gyawali, Superintendent of Police of Jhapa, told The Hindu.

Admitting that the SSB personnel were in the wrong for entering Nepali territory without permission, DG SSB B.D. Sharma said the situation was resolved after he and chief of the APF Kesh Raj Onta spoke to each other. Sources said the government would not react officially, so as not to further harm bilateral relations that have deteriorated since Nepal promulgated a Constitution that India has objected to. However, the government of Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli has consistently accused India of fuelling Madhesi protests against the Constitution, a charge India denies. The competing narratives have led to an all-out propaganda war between New Delhi and Kathmandu this week, with the Ministry of External Affairs flying in the first of two delegations of journalists to Birgunj and Kathmandu. An official said the visits were part of a "media outreach." In response, the Nepali embassy has decided to organise visits by Indian journalists to Nepal to "show the impact" of the blockade on citizens.

## **Madhesi leaders reject Nepal's package**

In a setback to peacemaking efforts by External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, the United Madhesi Democratic Front of Nepal on Monday rejected the "Framework Agreement" that the Nepal government had presented as a breakthrough solution to the nearly four-month-long economic blockade.

In a forceful speech presented in the Rajya Sabha on Monday, Ms. Swaraj urged for reconciliation and justice for the impoverished people of Nepal as well as the Madhesi protesters. But speaking to The Hindu , Rajendra Mahato, former Minister of Nepal and senior member of the UMDF delegation, said that the Nepal government's disinclination to discuss boundary demarcation for a single Madhes province stretching from Mechi in the east to Mahakali in the west had proved that the government of K.P. Sharma Oli was not yet sincere about guaranteeing rights to the Madhesi people.

The Madhesi leaders said that though they had a good meeting with Ms. Swaraj at the Hyderabad House, they remained unconvinced about Nepal's sincerity. "Kamal Thapa has proposed a three-step solution package and suggested that the issue of creation of a federal united province of Madhes will be discussed in a committee after three months.

Mr. Thapa is trying to deceive us because the issue of a Madhesi province has already been suggested by two different committees that were set up earlier. There is absolutely no need to set up a new committee. The government needs to set up the province of Madhes with all due rights and safeguards for the Madhesi people of Nepal," Mr. Mahato said.

The Madhesi delegation, which is on a four-day visit to Delhi, has conveyed to

New Delhi that the ongoing protest in the Madhes region is the third in the recent history of Nepal and therefore has acquired the kind of intensity that can be witnessed at the Birgunj border trade post where India has a consulate. "India should understand that the blockade of Birgunj border trade post is not engineered by the leadership but by the lakhs of Madhesi people who have faced continuous humiliation in the hands of the Nepali elite," said Mr. Mahato.

### **India welcomes, Madhesis reject Kathmandu package**

In the first sign of a breakthrough in understanding between India and Nepal, the government welcomed steps by the Nepali Cabinet to amend the new Constitution. However, the amendment proposals are yet to be welcomed by protesting Madhesi groups, with the main UMDF calling them "a disappointment", raising questions whether the move would lead to the end of the three-month-old blockade at the India-Nepal border that has caused a humanitarian crisis.

In an emergency meeting of the Nepal Cabinet on Monday, Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli promised to address the contentious issues of demarcation of States, delimitation of constituencies, proportional representation for Madhesis, and strict citizenship rules. Reacting to the proposals that include amending the Constitution, the Ministry of External Affairs said India was a "well-wisher" of Nepal. "The government of India welcomes these developments as positive steps that help create the basis for a resolution of the current impasse in Nepal. We urge all Nepali political forces to now demonstrate the necessary maturity and flexibility to find a satisfactory solution to the constitutional issues through constructive dialogue in an agreed time-frame". According

to sources, Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister Kamal Thapa consulted External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj over the last week before finally taking the solution package to the Madhesi groups. Mr. Thapa, who returned from London during the weekend, had spoken to Ms. Swaraj thrice from London to inform her of the developments. However, the Madhesi protesters have described the solution package as a betrayal of promises made by Mr. Oli.

"We are deeply disappointed by the solution package as it leaves out the main issue of our land and identity," said Rajinder Mahato of United Madhes Democratic Front. Terming India's welcome of the solution package as a negative development, Mr Mahato told The Hindu that India should have consulted the Madhesi leaders before issuing the statement praising the statement.

"We want Kathmandu to clearly demarcate the province of Madhes. We will not end our agitation without the demarcation of the province," said Upendra Yadav of UMDF. Mr. Yadav said apart from the issue of absence of demarcation and a clear timeline, the solution package was also vague in commitments on the promised constitutional amendments.

### **Articles from The Wall Street Journal**

**Nepal Officials Agree on Plan to Divide Country into Six States; All of the landlocked South Asian nation's states would share a border with main trade partner India**

Nepal's major political parties agreed over the weekend on how to divide the country into states in a significant step that could help speed the adoption of a new

federal constitution.

The Himalayan nation has struggled to codify a new political system to replace a centuries-old monarchy that ended in 2008 after years of civil war between the government and Maoist insurgents.

"I heartily call on everyone to not get stuck on minor disagreements and work toward nation-building and development," Prime Minister Sushil Koirala said in his Twitter profile Sunday.

April's devastating earthquake , which killed nearly 9,000 people in Nepal, helped spur political compromise. The main political parties agreed on a draft constitution in June, but the boundaries of states had been left undefined.

Under the deal worked out among the parties, Nepal would have six states, all of which would share borders with India, Nepal's southern neighbor and its largest trading partner and source of foreign investment.

The agreement failed to satisfy smaller parties from the country's southern plains, which said the plan to divide parts of Nepal's plains and amalgamate them with hills would perpetuate discrimination against the country's lowland Madhesi community.

"This is a new ploy by the political elites from the hills to continue to subjugate Madhes," said Rajendra Mahato, a senior Madhesi leader. "We will strongly protest this state demarcation."

Some indigenous people rallied in Kathmandu, the capital, on Sunday against the state demarcation.

"Any discontent or disagreement can be resolved politically and peacefully," said

Prateek Pradhan, a spokesman for Prime Minister Koirala.

Also over the weekend, the major political players agreed to change the constitution's citizenship provisions so that a person qualifies for citizenship if his or her mother or father is a Nepalese national. The earlier draft had said both parents needed to be Nepali.

The major parties have said they plan to promulgate the new constitution by mid-to-late August.

### **Nepal Protest Leaves 8 Dead, Dozens Injured; Violence stems from anger over how government plans to divide country into states**

NEW DELHI--At least eight people were killed in Nepal Monday in a violent protest by groups unhappy with how the government plans to divide the country into states.

At least seven policemen and a 2-year-old child died after hundreds of people from the Tharu community started protesting Monday afternoon demanding the new state borders be drawn in a way to allow them to control their own state.

Protesters using axes, spears and sticks surrounded police and attacked them in a town called Tikapur in far western Nepal, said Rajkumar Shrestha, chief district officer.

"Seven policemen and a child have been confirmed dead," Mr. Shrestha said. About 40 other people were injured, he said.

Home Minister Bam Dev Gautam said armed protesters in two other districts in southern Nepal were also rioting, attacking government buildings. The government has mobilized army troops to keep the peace in those places, he told Nepal's Constituent

Assembly, which functions as the country's parliament.

Protests flared up after a final draft of the country's constitution--which included plans to split the country into states--was presented in the Constituent Assembly on Sunday.

While Nepal's leading political parties had agreed to divide the country into states based on ethnicity and economic ties, many of the smaller parties representing smaller communities weren't happy with the planned number of states and borders. Some of the smaller groups are worried that the country was being carved up in a way that would marginalize them.

Indigenous groups like the Tharus say the planned demarcation would perpetuate hegemony of upper caste groups.

"The main reason for today's sad incident is the haphazard way the major political parties have made the new states," said Hridayesh Tripathi, a senior political leader from the country's southern plains.

"The possibility of including everybody's demands in the constitution hasn't ended," said Prime Minister Sushil Koirala through his official Twitter account. "I urge everybody to come to negotiations for a peaceful solution." Nepal has been struggling to codify a new system of governance since the end of its monarchy in 2008. The largest political parties have said they hope to finish a new constitution within the next few weeks.

**Political Upheaval Stymies Nepal Quake Recovery; Government struggles to help thousands who remain homeless after April earthquake**

KATHMANDU, Nepal--Political turmoil is stymieing recovery after devastating earthquakes this year that killed nearly 9,000 people and left hundreds of thousands homeless across this impoverished Himalayan nation.

Over the past month, strikes and clashes between police and protesters trying to block a new constitution have left more than 30 people dead and brought economic life to halt in parts of southern Nepal.

A government agency was set up to oversee rebuilding after the April 25 quake, but it was stripped of its powers last month when lawmakers, caught up in political wrangling over constitutional provisions, failed to approve legislation required to allow it to keep operating.

"Our development partners, donors, the people of Nepal are asking questions," said Govind Raj Pokharel, the man appointed last month to head the National Reconstruction Authority. He accused politicians of acting "negligently" and said he hoped the necessary law would be passed next week. "The delays are very frustrating," he said.

There is little time to lose, with winter approaching and large numbers of displaced people lacking adequate shelter and food supplies more than four months after the 7.8-magnitude quake.

In Sindhupalchowk district, northeast of Kathmandu, 27-year-old Sarita Aryal still sleeps under a cloth and tarpaulin tent with 17 others, surviving on a dwindling supply of donated rice.

Along the same debris-strewn mountain road, Buddha Bahadur Tamang lives in a

makeshift shelter he constructed with corrugated iron sheets that leaks when it rains.

"This is our new life," said Mr. Tamang, a 48-year-old farmer. "We can't think how we will get back to normal."

Many survivors say they are bracing for years of scraping by on the aid they have received so far--some food and \$150 in government handouts for temporary shelters that will provide little protection during severe winter weather in the mountains.

The government is trying to persuade opponents of the new constitution, in the works for more than seven years, to end protests and negotiate. Meanwhile, \$4.4 billion pledged by development agencies and foreign governments more than two months ago remains unused.

Official decision making is an arduous process in the country's fractious democracy, wrought with political fighting and weak leadership. The country has struggled to spend its own budget in the past, hamstrung by inadequate government capacity.

Mr. Pokharel, a veteran of the country's national planning commission, hopes to train a small army of masons and other skilled workers to build quake-resistant homes, find ways to stimulate economic activity in farming communities, and resurrect fallen monuments that had been a centerpiece of the country's tourism industry. Officials are planning to distribute nearly \$1,900 to families that have lost their homes--a sum meant to be used to construct permanent houses using government-distributed designs.

Others say they hope the government will find a way to create jobs. Buji Bahadur Karki, 50, who spent four months in a tent settlement in the city of Bhaktapur, said he

hasn't been able to find work. Heavy rains last month flooded his cloth tent, with water rising up to his chest.

His family lost most of their few belongings, including mattresses, a cooking stove and some clothes. "What can we do now?" said Mr. Karki. "We need help, not promises."

Until Mr. Pokharel and the rest of the government draft a road map, donors say they aren't entirely certain about where and how their money will be spent. "Everything is very preliminary and tentative right now, nothing is concrete," one diplomat said.

Mr. Pokharel is working from his old office while a new headquarters for the authority is erected. Reconstruction plans are being drafted by a handful of aides and officials borrowed from various ministries, a fraction of the two dozen staffers he plans to recruit.

Delays have frustrated billionaire philanthropist Binod Chaudhary, who says rebuilding homes and schools is a task that can't wait. Teams from his conglomerate--which includes businesses ranging from noodle manufacturing to hotels--are building so-called transitional homes that use a sturdy combination of bamboo, plastered walls and metal sheets that cost \$750. "Instead of one big, long-term plan, what we need is 100 quick, workable homes and schools," Mr. Chaudhary said.

Mr. Chaudhary said he also hoping to raise funds from global businesses and philanthropists so his foundation can do more. In an effort to build 10,000 homes, it has so far drawn pledges from Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba and South Korean electronics company LG. "People want to contribute to a platform where they know where their money is going," Mr. Chaudhary said.

The Reconstruction Authority's Mr. Pokharel said he encourages nonprofits and private companies to help. But, he added, "They have to work through the government or with it."

Mr. Pokharel and other officials point to what they say was a lack of coordination and transparency that undermined relief efforts after the 2010 quake in Haiti, and say they are determined to keep Nepal from making the same mistakes.

The government faces another challenge: managing expectations. Some survivors have demanded that the state rebuild destroyed homes. "We have to prioritize government infrastructure, people must start to look after themselves," said Balabhadra Giri, Sindhupalchowk's chief.

**Nepalese Lawmakers Approve New Constitution; But opposition persists to the document, especially the drawing of borders for new federal states**

Nepalese lawmakers on Wednesday voted overwhelmingly to approve a new constitution that will turn the former Himalayan monarchy into a secular, multiparty democracy.

The passage was the culmination of a long-running and at-times tumultuous process that started seven years ago after the end of a Maoist insurgency and the abdication of the country's king.

Most recently, tensions have flared over the demarcation of the states that will make up Nepal's federal republic. More than 36 people have died in clashes between police and protesters opposed to the new boundaries.

"It's a matter of glory for all Nepalese," read a tweet from the official account of

Prime Minister Sushil Koirala. The new constitution is expected to come into force after being unveiled by President Ram Baran Yadav on Sunday. When the constitution becomes effective, the Constituent Assembly that approved it will become a full-fledged Parliament.

Mr. Koirala is expected to hand power to K.P. Sharma Oli, a senior leader of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), who would lead the coalition government until new elections are held at a still-undisclosed date.

Subodh Raj Pyakurel, chairman of Informal Sector Service Center, a Kathmandu-based human-rights group said the new constitution "is a progressive document that represents aspirations of the majority of the Nepalese people."

Wrangling over the constitution as well as street protests and strikes called by those who oppose it have delayed recovery efforts in Nepal, which was hit by a series of earthquakes earlier this year that killed nearly 9,000 people.

Smaller political parties from the country's southern plains, who oppose the state boundaries and other parts of the new constitution, said they would continue to fight those provisions. "It will be nothing more than a piece of paper for us," said Rajendra Mahato, a senior plains politician. He said the opposition would "wage a decisive peaceful battle against the discriminatory state which has shoved this constitution to the people."

The three major political parties in the Constituent Assembly that voted in favor of the new constitution have urged opposing parties to negotiate, saying their demands can be accommodated by amendments in the constitution later.

In Wednesday's final vote on the Constitution, Maoist lawmakers voted in favor, along with the Nepali Congress party and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist). The party of former royalists that favored reinstatement of Hindu-nation status and monarchy voted against the constitution.

### **Nepal Rations Fuel Amid Concerns of Shortage; Decision comes after weeks of protests in the country's south against the new constitution**

Nepal on Monday started rationing fuel amid concerns of a shortage following weeks of protests in the country's south against the new constitution.

State-owned company Nepal Oil Corp., which is responsible for the import and sale of petroleum products in the country, said an "extremely difficult situation has arisen" due to disruption of supplies at checkpoints along Nepal's border with India.

It requested consumers to "heavily cut the consumption and use the petroleum products only when it's most necessary."

More than 40 people have died in recent weeks, according to Nepal police, as protesters from Nepal's southern plains clashed with police near the country's border with India as they demonstrated against parts of the constitution, including state demarcation, citizenship and other provisions, saying they will marginalize them. Nepalese officials at border checkpoints said trucks have been prevented from traveling into Nepal for several days by Indian customs officials, although a few were allowed to pass through on Monday. India accounts for more than 60% of Nepal's foreign trade, and most of its imports come from and through its southern neighbor. India, which has denied it is stopping trucks from entering Nepal, said Indian freight companies have security

concerns because of prevailing violence along the border.

"We have repeatedly said that there is no blockade from our side," Vikas Swarup, spokesman for India's Foreign Ministry, said on Monday.

Minendra Rijal, Nepal's minister for Information and Communications, said on Monday that despite India's claim "it has been felt as a blockade in Nepal and the general public is facing difficulties."

Long lines of vehicles were seen at various oil filling stations in Kathmandu on Monday.

Mr. Rijal said Nepal is addressing the security situation by providing freight trucks and containers with security personnel and inviting the protesting parties for talks in the south.

India has said that Nepal's new constitution should be inclusive and that issues with the protesting political parties in the plains, called Madhes or Terai, should be solved politically.

Rajendra Mahato, a senior Madhesi leader who is leading the movement in the plains, said political parties had imposed a "blockade against Kathmandu establishment."

"This is a blockade imposed by us, not India," Mr. Mahato said. "To say it's done by India is to propagate anti-India nationalism in a bid to fail our movement," he said.

He added that the movement in the plains would continue until the government addresses the plains parties' demands, including the revision of state boundaries in such a way that Tharus, an ethnic community in southwestern plains of Nepal, and Madhesis have separate states without amalgamating them with other districts.

Long-distance international flights to Kathmandu, the capital, are also expected to be affected by the rationing because of a lack of aviation oil for refueling, according to the spokesman for Nepal's Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation.

Nepal's media have accused India of an "undeclared blockade" and many Nepalese have staged protests on roads against what they say is India's alleged interference in the internal affairs of their country.

Nepalese officials said they are ready to provide security for tanks, trucks and containers carrying goods to the country and added that no trucks have been damaged during the protests.

A statement from India's Foreign Ministry on Friday said "the reported obstructions are due to unrest, protests and demonstrations on the Nepalese side, by section of their population."

### **Nepal Chooses Communist Prime Minister as Protests Continue; Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli says ending violence, restoring fuel imports are top priorities**

NEW DELHI--Nepal's Parliament chose a Communist leader to be the country's prime minister on Sunday as the Himalayan nation grapples with debilitating protests against a new constitution.

Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli, of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), said ending violence and restoring disrupted imports of fuel and other essentials would be his top priorities.

The upheaval has set back recovery efforts after earthquakes devastated large swaths of the country earlier this year. Many people remain without adequate shelter with

winter approaching.

More than 40 people have died in clashes between security forces and Madhesi demonstrators from Nepal's southern plains, who say the country's new charter will leave them underrepresented.

Mr. Oli, 63 years old, told reporters in Kathmandu on Sunday that he would reach out to political parties representing the Madhesis, who argue that the constitution favors other ethnic groups.

"My aim is to take everybody along," Mr. Oli said.

Protests have interrupted imports from India, Nepal's southern neighbor and main trading partner, triggering an acute fuel crisis. Demonstrators have blocked main border crossings.

Many Nepalese blame India for imposing what they call a "blockade" in support of Madhesi demands, something India denies.

Surya Sedai, a spokesman for Nepal's Department of Customs, said India has allowed only a few goods to pass through the border.

"Most of our goods are still stuck on the other side," he said.

On Thursday, India's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Vikas Swarup, said, "There is no blockade by India on Nepal either official or unofficial."

India and Madhesi leaders say it is Madhesi protesters who have halted the flow of goods.

India has said it wants Nepal to address the concerns of the plains protesters, who want the new constitution amended to make changes to state boundaries.

The "need of the hour is Nepal has to set its house in order and has to reach out to its own people in a spirit of reconciliation so that the border obstruction which is currently obstructing movement of traffic from India to Nepal is eased at the earliest," India's Mr. Swarup said.

The plains parties said they would continue protests at border checkpoints until their demands are met.

### **Nepal Signs Fuel Deal With China Amid Supply Disruptions; Nepalese officials blame India for restricting the flow of commodities**

NEW DELHI--Feeling squeezed by India, Nepal is looking to deepen commercial ties with Beijing. Authorities from the Himalayan nation said Thursday they had signed a preliminary deal to import as much as a third of the fuel the country needs from China.

The deal is a response to a weeks-long disruption of supplies from India that has brought life in the landlocked country to a standstill. Nepalese officials blame New Delhi for restricting the flow of essential commodities into the country amid a dispute over its new constitution.

India has dismissed the allegations, blaming the trade slowdown on anti-constitution protesters from Nepal's plains who have staged sit-ins and other demonstrations that have blocked or impeded traffic at major border crossings.

Still, crippling gas shortages have sparked anti-India feelings among Nepalis, eroding the goodwill Prime Minister Narendra Modi had garnered earlier this year by offering rapid and extensive assistance to the impoverished nation reeling from earthquakes that struck in April and May.

The souring of ties represents a setback for Mr. Modi's efforts to forge closer regional relations and reclaim India's standing in South Asia in the face of a growing Chinese presence.

Deepak Baral, a spokesman for state-owned Nepal Oil Corp., said the company had signed a petroleum-supply deal with state-owned China National United Oil Corp., the first such arrangement between the countries. "India is not supplying enough fuel, so there is no other way for us except to go to our other neighbor, China," Mr. Baral said.

The deal follows Beijing's grant of a 1,000 metric tons of petroleum--a day's consumption in Kathmandu under regular circumstances, according to Nepal Oil Corp.--as a "goodwill gesture" that is due to arrive later this week.

Lu Kang, a spokesman for China's Foreign Ministry, said Thursday that Beijing had "recently decided to supply Nepal with a certain amount of emergency fuel support." He said the two sides had also discussed "next steps regarding the trade of oil products."

Officials in Kathmandu have from time to time sought to take advantage of the rivalry between Nepal's giant neighbors. India, which shares close religious and cultural ties with Hindu-majority Nepal and has an open border that allows people to move freely, has long been irked by gradually strengthening China-Nepal relations. The details of Nepal's deal with China, such as the price of the fuel and logistical arrangements to transport it, are yet to be settled, Mr. Baral said. He said moving Chinese fuel across Nepal's northern Himalayan border would make it "slightly more expensive" than supplies from India that travel relatively smoothly over the country's southern plains.

Two crossings on Nepal's border with China that had been blocked by the earthquakes are now open, Mr. Baral said. Nepalese officials traveled to the Tibetan region Thursday to explore routes and pick-up points for Nepalese tankers to fetch Chinese fuel and Beijing has agreed to build storage depots close to the border to facilitate the trade, he added.

On the border with India, officials say oil tankers are being slowly diverted away from the main chokepoint, where protesters have blocked a bridge preventing trucks from moving in, to other crossings, where traffic is flowing more smoothly. Still, only a third of the regular supply has been reinstated, Indian and Nepalese officials say.

### **Articles from My Republica**

#### **Top leaders for resolving delineation issue**

The Constitutional Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee (CPDCC) of the Constituent Assembly (CA) has failed to decide which of the provisions in the draft constitution to change and which not on the basis of public feedback even as the deadline given to the committee for the purpose expired on Sunday. Leaders at a CPDCC meeting on Sunday decided to seek a few more days to settle unresolved issues.

"The committee decided to make further efforts as top leaders of the special committee have reached an understanding that at least delineation of provinces should be resolved before finalizing the draft constitution," CPDCC Chairperson Baburam Bhattarai told reporters while emerging from the meeting at Singha Durbar. Bhattarai has adjourned the committee meeting until further notice.

The CA full House had last week tasked the committee with sifting through

thousands of suggestions and recommending changes to the draft constitution by Sunday.

But the committee failed to accomplish the task within the given timeframe as top leaders, who are also members of the committee, reached an understanding to resolve the issue of delineation of provinces before finalizing the draft constitution.

The CPDCC had earlier formed a special committee comprising chiefs of major political parties with the mandate to decide major issues related to federalism, religion and citizenship, among other crucial provisions. Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, CPN-UML Chairman KP Sharma Oli, UCPN (Maoist) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Madhesi People's Rights Forum-Democratic (MPRF-D) are members of the special committee headed by Bhattarai.

During feedback collection, a large number of people raised their voice for changing the word "secular", while others objected to provisions related to citizenship.

However, CPN-UML leaders at the CPDCC meeting strongly objected to the committee's decision to take more time for settling disputes.

CPN-UML leader Keshav Badal at the meeting described the decision as a move aimed at derailing the constitution making process. "I objected this decision because this is a ploy to derail the constitution making process," Badal told reporters while emerging from the meeting. He also claimed that this decision goes against the recent 16-point deal that helped settle key constitutional disputes and expedite the constitution making process.

Though Badal was the only UML lawmaker to officially register the party's view at the meeting, other members of the party also expressed their reservations over the

decision.

CPDCC member Rajan Bhattarai from the same party said that his party is strongly against delaying the process on any pretext. "We are also ready to resolve the delineation issue but the constitution mustn't be delayed on any pretext. We suspect other parties have revived this issue with a motive to derail the process," said Bhattarai.

Also, Chairman of Nepal Workers Peasants Party (NWPP) Narayanman Bijukchhe at the meeting claimed that the top leaders were trying to delay the process at the behest of foreign forces.

"The issue of delineating provinces has been revived after some leaders visited New Delhi. They have been doing so as per instructions from New Delhi," a CPDCC member quoted Bijukchhe as saying at the meeting.

### **Parties claim close to deal on key disputes**

Top leaders of major political parties have claimed that they have reached close to an agreement on key contentious issues of the new constitution.

The leaders made the claim after the meeting of Special Committee formed under Constitutional, Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee (CPDCC) held at Singha Durbar on Tuesday evening.

According to leaders involved in negotiations, they have decided to finalize the issues during a meeting to be held with the top leaders on Wednesday morning. "We are close to an agreement on all issues. We will reach some form of consensus by Wednesday evening," NC Vice President Ram Chandra Paudel told media persons after the meeting.

Among other things, the major parties have agreed to remove the term "secular" from the preamble of the new statute and replace it with an appropriate term acceptable to all and clarify the provisions related to citizenship to address the concerns of women and Madhes-based political parties. The parties have agreed to remove the word Nepal from the Article 13 (3) of the draft constitution and clarify the term 'Nepali origin' keeping in view the concerns of the Madhesi people.

However, the major parties are still at odds over the official language and whether to keep the term 'father or mother' or 'father and mother' in the citizenship provision.

CPDCC Chairman Baburam Bhattarai, who is also the coordinator of the Special Committee, expressed happiness over the progress made during the Special Committee meeting on Tuesday. "Significant progress has been made as top leaders, including the prime minister, attended the Special Committee meeting today," said Bhattarai.

The Special Committee is entrusted with settling key contentious issues of the new statute such as state demarcation, citizenship and demand for direct election for key political positions. NC Vice President Paudel said they plan to submit the report after settling disputed issues of new statute on Thursday.

The decision to submit the report comes after CA Chairman Subas Nembang on Tuesday drew the attention of CPDCC Secretary Mukunda Sharma over the delay in submission of the final report to the CA. The CPDCC is already three days behind schedule.

Discussions under way to reduce number of provinces

CPN-UML Chairman K P Sharma Oli and NC Vice President Ram Chandra

Paudel have said that discussions are under way among major parties on reducing the number of federal provinces to six as per the public feedback.

"We proposed eight federal states in the first draft constitution to allow discussion among the people. People have suggested us not to go for more than six states.

Discussions are now being held to reduce the number of federal provinces," said UML Chairman KP Sharma Oli.

Oli said parties are holding discussions on various options including three, five and six-province federal models. "We are committed to promulgating the new statute with boundaries of federal provinces. But constitution promulgation won't stop in case we fail to settle boundaries. Constitution will be promulgated on time," he said.

#### **4 major parties agree on 6 provinces**

Two months after major political forces signed a political deal agreeing to federate the country into eight provinces, top leaders from the same parties have now decided to reduce the number to six.

The leaders this time have not only fixed the number but also drawn the boundaries of the proposed provinces, although disputes remain over three districts.

The leaders while emerging from a meeting held at Singha Durbar on Wednesday evening claimed to have resolved all remaining disputes and said the final decision would be made by Thursday.

While signing the deal in June, leaders had agreed only on the number of provinces and decided to delineate provinces after promulgation of the new constitution based on the recommendation of a federal commission and to allow provincial assemblies

to name themselves.

This time, the leaders from Nepali Congress, CPN-UML, UCPN (Maoist) and Madhesi People's Rights Forum- Democratic (MPRF-D) have decided to federate the country into six provinces.

They have also resolved the dispute over five districts -- Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari in the east and Kailali and Kanchanpur in the west. This had remained the most contentious issue in the past. However, they are yet to agree on Kailali district. UCPN (Maoist) and Madhes-based parties have been lobbying for including Kailali district in Madhes province while NC and UML have strongly opposed the idea of separating it from other far- western hill districts.

In the east, they have delineated a province comprising Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari and other eastern hill districts. All the districts to the east of Udayapur, Okhaldhunga and Solukhumbu are in the eastern province. However, MPRF-D Chairman Bijay Gachchhadar is still insisting on including Saptari district in this province.

All the southern districts from the west of Saptari to Parsa are included in a single province. Similarly, the southern area covering Nawalparasi to Bardiya has been included in another Tarai province. However, leaders remain undecided on Kailali.

The leaders have included Chitwan district in the province comprising Kathmandu and other districts east of Dhading, Nuwakot and Rasuwa. This province stretches up to Ramechhap and Sindhuli in the east.

Likewise, another province covers hill districts from Gorkha, Lamjung to Rukum and Rolpa in the west. As this province has no connection with the Indian border, leaders

are for giving an exit somewhere in Nawalparasi district.

The far-western province covers all the districts in this region. Salyan, Jajarkot and Dolpa and all other districts west of it fall in this province. The Tarai district of Kanchanpur has been included in this province.

While emerging from the meeting, top leaders from all the four major political parties said they are very close to an agreement and that they will sign a deal by Thursday.

NC Vice-chairman Ram Chandra Paudel, CPN-UML Chairman KP Sharma Oli, UCPN (Maoist) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, MPRF-D Chairman Bijay Gachchhadar and Chairman of CA's Constitutional Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee (CPDCC) Baburam Bhattarai also said that they will finalize the issues by Thursday.

"We need just two hours to give the final touch to the agreements we have reached so far. So, let's wait until tomorrow," Bhattarai told reporters.

Oli said they have agreed that the number of provinces would not exceed six and that they just need a few hours to finalize the agreement. "We have reached a broad agreement. We just need to connect some dots and we will finish the task by tomorrow," said Oli.

The leaders also informed that they have settled other contentious issues such as citizenship provision and the policy on inclusion.

A federal commission will be constituted to work out the technical details of various aspects of the federal system.

**4-party meet underway as Gachchhadar arrives**

Madhesi People's Rights Forum-Democratic (MPRF-D) Chairman Bijaya Kumar Gachchhadar has returned to Kathmandu after the major fur parties wrangled over the delineation of the provinces.

He has returned to the capital by a morning flight.

"He has arrived in Kathmandu by a morning flight," Party Chief Whip Ram Janam Chaudhary told Republica. Chairman Gachchhadar had headed to Biratnagar with an agenda of carving out three provinces in the Tarai region.

A meeting of the Constitutional-Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee (CPDCC) to be held in Friday afternoon is expected to finalize the issues of federalism.

With the disputes among the four political parties unsettled, the August 17 deadline to promulgate the new constitution is likely to be affected.

### **NBA expresses dissatisfaction over JC recommendations**

The Nepal Bar Association has expressed dissatisfaction over the Judicial Council's recommendation for appointment of 60 gazetted second-class officers as district court judges.

The annual general assembly of the NBA that concluded in the capital on Saturday criticized the council's recommendation, stating that the council's move has barred advocates from entering judiciary as judges.

The annual report presented by NBA General Secretary Sunil Kumar Pokharel stated that the council's move to recommend district court judges is just to avoid changed provisions in the new constitution.

"The proposed provision regarding appointment of district court judges in the new

constitution would open the door to advocates with eight years of experience to become judges through competition. The recommendation made by the council is to avoid the new constitution and bar lawyers from entering judicial service," stated the annual report presented by Pokharel.

Pokharel informed that the general assembly endorsed his report through majority and criticized the council's recommendation.

The council's meeting on Thursday morning decided to recommend names of 39 officials of judicial service and 21 government attorneys and legal officers for the appointment process.

### **Leaders vow to adjust provincial boundaries**

As the latest decision to federate the country into six provinces and declaration of provincial boundaries draws reactions from various parts of the country, top leaders on Sunday vowed to make corrections to the boundaries announced on Saturday.

Stating that the boundaries announced now weren't the final one, leaders said they would make adjustments and revise their decisions based on feedback from local representatives.

"This is not a final decision. A federal commission mandated to look into problems related to boundaries and other provincial issues shall be formed," Chairman of CA's Constitutional Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee (CPDCC) told reporters while emerging from the committee's meeting at Singha Durbar on Sunday. The committee meeting endorsed the proposal prepared by the special committee tasked with finalizing the number of provinces and their boundaries. As mandated by the CPDCC, the

special committee decided to federate the country into six provinces, announced their boundaries and submitted this report to the full committee last night.

The CPDCC had last week formed the special committee comprising prime minister, chiefs and some other key leaders of Nepali Congress (NC), CPN-UML, UCPN (Maoist) and Madhesi People's Rights Forum-Democratic (MPRF-D).

Bhattarai said the special committee will continuously work to settle the remaining disputes and recommend suggestions to the CA's Constitution Drafting Committee.

Lawmakers and other local representatives from Baglung and Rukum among some other districts strongly opposed the proposed demarcation as these districts were divided for inclusion in different provinces.

NC Vice-chairman Ram Chandra Paudel said they have decided to make some adjustments to the boundaries as a large number of people, mainly from Baglung and Rukum, voiced their concerns against division of their districts. Also, lawmakers from various major political parties have demanded delineation of Karnali as a separate province.

"The decision regarding division of Baglung district will be corrected because a majority of the people there objected to the decision," said Paudel.

Also, some leaders including former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Bamdev Gautam assured lawmakers and representatives from Baglung to keep the district intact. Paudel, however, claimed that the locals in Nawalparasi weren't dissatisfied with the decision to divide the district. "People

in Nawalparasi have no grievances because the parts we have now separated were included into Nawalparasi only some years back," he argued.

He said demarcation and other issues of federalism will be taken up by political leadership and the experts' commission as well.

"We will look into the issues through political perspective while the commission will analyze them through expert perspectives," he said.

Meanwhile, CPDCC Chairman Bhattarai tabled the report to the CA full House meeting later in the evening amid protest by various dissident political parties.

Lawmakers from Rastriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal (RPP-N) and some Madhes-based parties chanted slogans while Bhattarai presented his report at the meeting.

RPP-N lawmakers have demanded removal of the country's secular status from the constitution while members from other parties have opposed the proposed federal model and various other provisions.

While tabling the report, Bhattarai claimed that the new constitution has ensured the rights of the people from downtrodden and deprived communities. "We are at the point of securing results of seven decades of struggle and the country is being transformed from a monolithic unitary monarchical state into a democratic federal republic," he said. "This is a big achievement for all those who were deprived of state power for ages."

He argued that a part of the establishment section of the country has now become restless as the downtrodden people are also going to enjoy equal status based on the new constitution.

"The political deal signed last midnight has laid a strong ground for a new constitution. Therefore, some elements have now become restless," he said.

After holding deliberations for a few days in the CA's full House, the report will be forwarded to the drafting committee for making changes in the draft constitution. After that the final draft will be tabled in the full House for final endorsement through two-thirds majority of the House.

### **Indian investors complain about lengthy dividend repatriation process**

Indian investors have complained about the lengthy process for repatriation of earnings from the country and demanded that the government work to make the process shorter if it wants to encourage investors.

Presenting a paper at 'Interaction with Indian Investors in Nepal' on Monday, Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce and Industry Vice President Budhaditya Mukherjee said that the process of returning earnings from Nepal to parent companies was lengthy.

Mukherjee is director of Asian Paints, an India-based company operating in Nepal.

Speaking at the same event, Khadga Bahadur Bishta, the president of Independent Power Producers Association, said that Norwegian Hydropower Company -- whom he works for -- has also been facing the same kind of problem for many years.

Government officials, however, said that there was no problem in repatriation of investment.

The Department of Industry Director General Maheshwor Neupane responded at the event that the government has to verify whether the investment inflow was via proper

banking channels and also confirm with the book of accounts of the firms and companies.

Bipin Rajbhandari, the chief of the Foreign Investment Division, told Republica that it took a maximum two weeks after submission of all essential documents for recommendation to be forwarded to Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB).

NRB Executive Director Nar Bahadur Thapa said that there was no problem if they (foreign companies) complied with the Industrial Enterprises Act and other related laws while allowing for the repatriation of dividend.

Mukherjee also listed sectors like tourism, agriculture, information technology, social media, and meat and dairy as investment opportunity areas inside Nepal.

Indian investors at the event also asked for tax rebate in reinvestment of dividend.

Investors have also sought investor-friendly labor laws, consumer-friendly regulation -- like tax rebate in insurance sector, and protection of intellectual property rights, and recognition, among others.

Likewise, there was also demand for maintaining of industrial zones and for progressive and longer transport windows for Indian vehicles for export and hassle-free operations. Investors also asked the government to prioritize manufacturing sectors over trading business.

Likewise, investors have asked the government to exempt factories from national holidays to increase productivity.

Speaking at the event, Indian Ambassador to Nepal Ranjit Rae suggested that Nepal should have road-shows in India to bring in investors. Referring to the slow service delivery of government agencies, Rae suggested taking up of problem solving attitudes

rather than quoting rules and law.

Industry Minister Mahesh Basnet said the government had decided to organize an investment summit this year and celebrate investment promotion years in 2016 and 2017.

The event was organized to discuss the investment climate post-earthquake by taking into consideration the rebuilding and reconstruction agenda, and the constitution-raftering process.

### **Lawmakers rap delineation for ignoring identity, economic viability**

Lawmakers have criticized the top leaders of major political parties for not taking five bases of identity and four bases of economic-viability into consideration while delineating the country into six federal provinces in the new constitution.

Registering their views on the revised draft of the new constitution in the Constituent Assembly (CA) meeting on Tuesday, lawmakers from various political parties demanded revision of the proposed delineation of provinces. Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal (RPP-N), Federal Socialist Forum Nepal (FSFN), Tarai Madhes Democratic Party (TMDP), Sadbhawana Party, Tarai-Madhes Sadbhawana Party (TMSP) and Nepali Janata Dal boycotted the CA the deliberations on revised draft opposing the new six-province model.

Airing his views on the draft, UCPN (Maoist) General Secretary Krishna Bahadur Mahara alleged the top leaders of ignoring the delineation criteria set by the previous CA. "The proposed mapping of provinces hurts the feelings of Tharu and Magar communities. It completely ignores the five bases of identity set by the past CA and the recent 16-point

political agreement," said Mahara.

Madhesi People's Right Forum Democratic (MPRF-D) Vice Chairman Jeetendra Dev also strongly demanded that the Nepali Congress (NC), CPN-UML and UCPN (Maoist) leaders revise the proposed map while addressing genuine concerns raised by Tharu and Rajbansi communities. "If the major three political parties are not ready to address these concerns within four days we may be compelled to withdraw our support to the six- province model," said Dev.

The first CA had defined ethnic, linguistic, cultural, geographical and historical continuity as five bases of identity and economic interrelation, status and prospect of infrastructural development, availability of natural resources and access to administrative facilities as four bases of economic viability.

Lawmakers from NC and UML also suggested revision of various issues in the draft including delineation of provinces. NC lawmaker Hridayaram Thani suggested declaring Karnali and areas in the farwestern region dominated by the Tharu community as special autonomous region. Referring to the power vested in the president in the new constitution, UML lawmakers Krishna Bhakta Pokhrel and Bhanubhakta Dhakal demanded correction to the provision.

Chairman of the Rastriya Janamorcha Chitra Bahadur KC said his party is ready to accept the draft although his party is against the very idea of federalism. Gopal Dahit of Tharuhat Tarai Party Nepal and Shiva Lal Thapa of Rastriya Janamukti Party also opposed the six-province model.

**House panel directs parties to maintain transparency**

Parliamentary Development Committee on Thursday directed all major political parties to ensure transparency in all their activities and their revenue and expenditures.

The Development Committee issued the directives after holding a meeting with Chief Information Commissioner Krishna Hari Banskota, other commissioners, senior leaders of major political parties, including Nepali Congress, CPN-UML, UCPN (Maoist), Madhesi People's Rights Forum-Democratic (MPRF-D) and Right to Information (RTI) experts on Thursday.

Chief Information Commissioner of National Information Commission (NIC) Krishna Hari Banskota at the meeting had urged political party leaders to make an arrangement for publicizing details of their respective parties every three months, appointing information officer, establishing Information Section and publicizing revenue and expenditures of their party on an annual basis.

Among other things, Banskota also urged political parties to maintain a website that is updated on a regular basis. The meeting chaired by Development Committee Chairman Rabindra Adhikari was attended by various political party leaders, including UML's Secretary Yogesh Dhakal, NC's Chief Secretary Rishikesh Tiwari, Tarai Madhes Democratic Party Jitendra Sonal, RPP's Kiran Giri, Madhesi People's Rights Forum-Democratic leader Dr Subodh Kumar Pokharel had spoken at the meeting. Although leaders maintained that maintain transparency in party activities was necessary, some of them argued that it was practically difficult to implement all transparency measures as some parties are still in their transformative stage.

Following the discussion, the Development Committee drew the attention of all

political parties toward implementing the provision of Right to Information Act, 2008.

The committee also drew the attention of the political parties to get their income and expenditure properly audited, appoint information officer, set up information section and publicize their information on a regular basis.

### **Major parties reach consensus on mid-west province**

District leaders of Nepali Congress, CPN-UML, UCPN-Maoists and Madhesi People's Rights Forum (Democratic) in Surkhet on Friday have reached a consensus on the demand for a separate province with Surkhet as the provincial capital.

"We four major political parties have agreed to demand a separate mid-west province and to develop Surkhet as the provincial capital," said NC district treasurer Govinda Koirala.

However, leaders from the same parties have disputes over the boundary of the province. NC and UML leaders are for delineating the province along north-south alignment while UCPN (Maoist) is against including Banke, Bardiya and Dang districts in the province.

Five days after locals had launched protests, the party leaders on Thursday had taken command of the ongoing protests in Surkhet district. They staged peace rallies carrying their respective party flags in Birendranagar, the district headquarters.

### **Security beefed up as statute promulgation nears**

With the constitution-making entering into its final stage, the government has tightened the security of key political leaders closely involved in the process and deployed additional forces around some vital places such as CA building in Baneshwar.

The government has recently deputed additional forces to the security details of chairman of the Constituent Assembly (CA) and other political leaders sensing security threats as constitution promulgation date draws closer. Major political parties have announced to deliver new constitution by the end of August.

Ministry of Home Affairs took the decision to beef up the security of some leaders and important sites based on the assessment of threats carried out in the presence of the Nepal Army, the Nepal Police, the Armed Police Force and the National Investigation Department (NID).

As the key person overseeing the entire constitution-making process, the security agencies have given special attention to the security of CA Chairman Subas Nembang.

"We have made necessary arrangements for CA chair's security, which includes deployment of adequate plainclothesmen," said Kamal Singh Bam, a deputy inspector general and spokesperson of the Nepal Police. Number of security personnel for his convoy, at his residence, along the routes he travels and even within the CA premises has been increased, he said adding.

As protests have been growing both in and outside the CA building, the number of demonstrators has also been swelling at New Baneshwar area. The security agencies expect the number of demonstrators in the area to grow drastically as the date for promulgating the new constitution approaches, DIG Bam said, adding that reserve forces might be called in to take positions if need arises.

District Administration Office (DAO) said that as part of its strategy to tighten security of important sites it is prepared to use barbed wires and barricades to ward off

protesters.

"We will widen the restricted area near Singha Durbar, the prime minister's residence at Baluwatar, the president's office at Shital Niwas and other sensitive areas and boost the presence of security personnel at various places if required," said the Kathmandu CDO Ek Narayan Aryal.

Security forces would be placed on high alert round the clock and VIPs will be kept under close watch to prevent any untoward incident during and after the constitution, CDO Aryal added.

RPP-N cadres clash with police at New Baneshwar

Tension flared up outside the Constituent Assembly building at New Baneshwar on Friday as the cadres of Rastriya Prajatantra Party, Nepal (RPP-N) clashed with the police.

The police said that they were compelled to fire teargas shells and use batons after the cadres of RPP-N tried to force their way into the prohibited zone, chanting slogans that the country be declared a Hindu state.

The police fired several rounds of teargas shells to take the situation under control, and the clash that ensued left more than two dozen people, including the cadres of RPP-N and the police.

DSP Dan Bahadur Karki, chief of Metropolitan Police Circle Office, New Baneshwar, said that they were compelled to use force after protesters resorted to violence despite their pledge to hold a peaceful rally.

The protesters had marched through the streets of Kathmandu before gathering

near the CA building.

The agitators, led by RPP-N leader Ganesh Thapa, vandalized government vehicles and demanded the resignation of Home Minister Bamdev Gautam.

The protestors chanted slogans for restoring Nepal as a Hindu state, saying that they were ready to wage a war to get their demand fulfilled.

RPP-N Deputy spokesperson Mohan Shrestha condemned the use of excessive force by the police against RPP-N cadres.

### **Leaders to change demarcations yet again**

As people in various parts of the country continue their protests against the proposed demarcation of federal provinces, top leaders from the major political parties have announced that they are to make adjustments in the province boundaries.

The party leaders, following a meeting Sunday, said they decided to make changes in the boundaries last week and they were ready even to change the number of provinces to respond to voices raised in various parts of the country. They had made several changes in the past also.

"The boundaries will certainly be reviewed. Baglung and Rukum, that were earlier split between two separate provinces, will now remain intact," said Nepali Congress (NC) Vice-president Ram Chandra Poudel while emerging from interparty negotiations at Singha Durbar.

Leaders involved in the talks said one more province is likely to be added and it will include parts of the western, mid-western and far-western districts.

UCPN (Maoist) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal said that they held serious

discussions on the demands raised by people in Surkhet, Karnali and Tharuwan. "We have agreed in principle that the issues raised in these areas should be addressed," said Dahal.

According to him, the leaders also discussed how to address demands raised by some lawmakers and local leaders from the tarai-Madhes districts. These have demanded that part of the hills should be included in proposed province no. 2 that now comprises only eight tarai districts.

"Friends who earlier demanded a separate Madhes province have now insisted that some hills must also be included in that province. We are discussing how to address this," said Bijya Gachchhadar, chairman of Madhesi People's Rights Forum-Democratic (MPRF-D).

UCPN (Maoist) leader Baburam Bhattarai informed that the leaders are also thinking how to address the demand for special autonomous zones for Karnali and Tharuwan.

Issues settled

The party leaders have resolved whether or not to reappoint the Supreme Court justices and the heads and members of constitutional bodies following the commencement of the new constitution.

Earlier, the CPN-UML and UCPN (Maoist) had been saying it was mandatory to reappoint them but the NC was strongly opposed.

"We concluded that reappointments were not necessary as the new constitution

was not introducing any new political system," said Gachchhadar.

#### Threshold

The top leaders have also reached understanding on a threshold criteria in the electoral system under the new constitution.

Gachchhadar said they decided to include a threshold provision with a view to ensure stability for the parliamentary system. However, they are yet to decide on the threshold percentage.

"We have been discussing different proposals ranging from two to five percent but we have yet to finalize it," he said.

The leaders are also yet to decide whether or not to remove secularism from the new constitution.

Some political parties have been insisting on removing that word while others have been opposing the removal proposal saying that was one of the major achievements of the popular movement of 2005.

Leaders from NC and UML, among others, have also proposed to replace the word 'secular' with 'religious freedom'.

The full CA last week gave the Constitution Drafting Committee a five-day deadline to update the draft constitution on the basis of recommendations made earlier by the Constitutional Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee (CPDCC). The deadline expires Monday. CPDCC had made some recommendations on the basis of public feedback from across the country.

But with the politicians yet to resolve some of the provisions, the drafting committee is unlikely to complete its task by Monday.

### **Local polls within 6 months of term expiry**

A meeting of top leaders from the major political parties Monday decided to include a provision in the new constitution making it mandatory to hold elections for the local bodies within six months of termination of the tenures of elected local representatives.

"We have decided to make it mandatory in the constitution to conduct local elections within six months after the positions at local bodies fall vacant," Baburam Bhattarai, chairman of the CA's Constitutional Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee, told reporters while emerging from the meeting.

The leaders also decided to include the deputy speaker as ex-officio member of the Constitutional Council (CC) so as to ensure the presence of a woman member on the Council.

Since the proposed constitution has made it mandatory to have a woman as either speaker or deputy speaker, the latest provision ensures the presence of a woman in the CC as well.

Similarly, the leaders made some changes to the provision on a parliamentary committee conducting monitoring and evaluating of judges and constitutional bodies.

The draft constitution included a provision allowing a parliamentary committee to monitor and evaluate the performance of judges and the constitutional bodies. But the Supreme Court and other constitutional bodies strongly opposed the provision.

Bhattarai also informed that they decided not to monitor and evaluate the National Human Rights Commission. Drafting committee misses deadline

The CA's Constitution Drafting Committee has failed to complete the task of revising the draft constitution within the five-day deadline that expired on Monday.

The CA full House meeting on Wednesday had directed the drafting committee to revise the draft constitution within five days on the basis of the suggestions offered by the CA's Constitutional Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee (CPDCC).

"We couldn't finish the task by today because some of the important issues such as secularism, electoral threshold and reappointment of judges and members of constitutional bodies remained unsettled," Krishna Sitaula, chairman of the drafting committee, told reporters at Singha Durbar on Monday. "These may take some more time to settle."

Leaders of the major political forces had agreed to make changes in the number and boundaries of the provinces, citizenship provision and electoral model, among other issues.

The draft constitution had a provision for eight provinces but this was brought down to six provinces after collecting public feedback.

Based on the same political agreement, the CPDCC had prepared its report and forwarded its recommendations for the drafting committee to make changes in the draft constitution.

Nepali Congress Vice-president Ram Chandra Poudel said the leaders are for holding talks with various dissident political parties and groups and trying to

accommodate their views in the new constitution as far as possible.

"Our latest approach is to negotiate with all sides even if it takes a couple of days," said Poudel.

### **Curfew in VDC after man dies in Saptari police firing**

The local administration in Saptari district clamped a curfew in Bhardaha VDC from 4 p.m. on Tuesday till 5 a.m., Wednesday after a man was killed in police firing.

Rajib Raut, a 25-year-old local farmer, was killed while four others agitating against the draft constitution sustained injuries during a clash between police and demonstrators, according to the district police office. Surendra Mandal, Devnarayan Bishwash, Dipak Sah and Gopalraj Mandal, who were injured, have been rushed to Biratnagar for treatment.

Saptari2

Although Raut was killed at around 8:30 a.m., Chief District Officer (CDO) Birendra Yadav formally confirmed the death at around 3 p.m. CDO Yadav informed a press meet organized at district headquarters Rajbiraj that the district administration has clamped a curfew in the Bhardaha area from 4 p.m. Tuesday till 5 a.m., Wednesday.

Reports about the incident by eyewitness, demonstrators, police and the local administration vary somewhat. Police spokesperson DSP Narayan Prasad Chimariya claimed that police opened fire when some 600-700 locals led by the United Madhesi Front tried to vandalize the area police office and set it ablaze. Raut was killed when police opened fire in self-defense, Chimariya asserted.

CDO Yadav for his part said, "When the agitators entered the area police office

and started to vandalize the communications sets, police had to open fire to bring the situation under control."

Police had resorted to several rounds of firing in the air and tear gas shells, according to DPO Saptari.

Saptari3

Meanwhile, agitators and eyewitnesses alleged that the police opened fire indiscriminately when the agitators took to the streets. They were continuing their protests from the previous day when they clashed with police trying to escort 250 vehicles stranded on the East-West Highway.

Meanwhile, human rights activists have condemned the incident. They have urged both the agitators and police to exercise patience. "The four injured were rushed for treatment only after we visited the site," said Shambunanda Choudhary, a human rights activist.

Following Raut's death, local demonstrators vandalized the police office and set materials there ablaze. The protests intensified at district headquarters also.

### **Lawmakers accuse Madhesi parties of inciting violence**

Speakers Subas Nembang has asked Home Minister Bam Dev Gautam to investigate whether Madhes-based political parties really announced Rs 5 million in compensation to the families of those who might get killed in the ongoing protests against proposed provincial boundaries.

Nembang issued the directive as several lawmakers fiercely criticized Madhesi leaders for "inciting people and sowing the seeds of communal violence in the region" by

issuing such a statement.

"A political party making such an announcement in a country where human rights and democratic values are respected is unimaginable," Nembang said at the House meeting on Thursday. "So, I direct the home minister to investigate whether any political party has issued such a statement and inform parliament about it."

Earlier, lawmakers from various political parties had come down heavily on Madhesi leaders for issuing such a statement.

A meeting of top leaders of four Madhes-based parties held in Kathmandu on Wednesday had issued the statement.

A joint press statement issued by Federal Socialist Forum Nepal (FSFN) Chairman Upendra Yadav, Tarai Madhes Democratic Party (TDMP) Chairman Mahantha Thakur, Sadbhavana Party Chairman Rajendra Mahato and Tarai Madhes Sadbhavana Party Nepal senior leader Ram Naresh Raya had said that the provincial government formed after the success of the protests would provide Rs 5 million each to the families of those killed in the protests.

Nepali Congress (NC) lawmaker Romi Gauchan Thakali while airing his views at the parliament meeting strongly objected to the statement.

"Any political ideology does not allow such a vile act. The motive behind inciting violence in the name of protests is questionable," said Thakali.

Rishikesh Pokharel of CPN-UML accused leaders of Madhesi parties of trying to incite communal violence. "Those who claim to be the messiah of Madhesi people are trying to incite violence just because they think that the new constitution would not serve

their interests," said Pokharel. "Who allowed them to take such a decision? This parliament must be informed by the government."

Janakraj Joshi of UCPN (Maoist) argued that even notorious criminals do not act so irresponsibly. "Any political party represented in the Constituent Assembly can't take such an irresponsible decision," said Joshi. "The home ministry must investigate into the matter and inform parliament about it."

### **Agitating Madhesi alliance to protest peacefully**

Following a clash between protestors and police on Wednesday that left two agitators severely injured, the agitating alliance of Madhesi parties expressed commitment to carry out only peaceful protests in the days ahead.

The alliance came up with the statement after local administration declared Taulihawa a restricted zone for one week after Wednesday's violent protest. On Thursday, the alliance did not organize any assembly, rally or protest programs.

During a meeting at the administration office to discuss the ongoing protests as well as peace and security in Taulihawa, Kapilvastu, the alliance gave a written commitment to make future protests peaceful. The agitating parties and administration office signed a four-point agreement at the program.

In the last two days, six cadres from the alliance and more than two dozen policemen have been injured in clashes.

Alliance members have vandalized four government offices during a series of protests against the proposed six- state federal structure.

### **Demarcation dispute delays constitution drafting**

The constitution drafting process has been delayed further as interparty talks aimed at resolving disputes over proposed provincial boundaries failed to make headway on Thursday even as the extended deadline given to the CA's constitution drafting committee for preparing the final draft is expiring on Friday.

Leaders claimed that the hours-long talks among leaders from Nepali Congress (NC), CPN-UML, UCPN (Maoist) and Madhesi People's Rights Forum-Democratic (MPRF-D) couldn't reach a decision as Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, who is also the president of NC, did not attend the meeting.

Former Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai of UCPN (Maoist) said they couldn't take a decision due to absence of the prime minister. He said leaders from other political parties have decided to urge the prime minister to take initiatives for a solution.

"NC leaders said they will talk to the prime minister and enquire him about his absence," Bhattarai told reporters while emerging from the meeting at Singha Durbar on Thursday evening.

The prime minister remained absent from the crucial interparty negotiations as he is dissatisfied with leaders, who proposed seven province model. The proposal was jointly floated by NC and UML last year as an alternative to the six-province model agreed upon by the major political parties earlier this month.

Leaders said the prime minister is irked by "some leaders' tendency to frequently shift goal-post."

UCPN (Maoist) leaders had reportedly proposed seven-province model on Wednesday while CPN-UML leaders were ready to discuss the matter.

CPN-UML Vice-chair Bidya Bhandari said the prime minister is unhappy as the proposal has been floated at a time when discussions are being held on finding a solution by making some corrections to the six-province model.

"The prime minister objected to the seven-province model at brief meeting held in the morning today. Then, he didn't show up at the meeting in the evening," said Bhandari.

According to her, the prime minister is for putting Rapti, Bheri and Karnali zones in a single province.

Krishna Sitaula, chairman of drafting committee, however, claimed that his committee would revise the draft constitution based on suggestions offered by the CA's Constitutional Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee (CPDCC) if the top leaders' team does not suggest any solution by Friday.

On federalism, the Bhattarai-led CPDCC has proposed six-province model.

UML Vice-chair Bhim Rawal, who is also a member of the drafting committee, claimed that they will present the revised draft constitution in the CA' full House by Friday evening.

### **Madhesi parties' announcement draws flak from all quarters**

The recent announcement by Madhes-based parties to provide Rs 5 million compensation to the families of those who might get killed in the protests against the proposed provincial boundaries has drawn flak from all quarters, including the locals of Madhes and cadres of the selfsame parties. "It seems that Madhesi leaders are trying to buy us. Although my own party has also made the announcement, I am completely against it," said Pushpa Mitra, a cadre of the Nepal Sadbhavana Party.

Similarly, Vinod Mahara, Dhanusha representative of INSEC Nepal, opined the decision makes a mockery of the human rights principles. "It is no less than a crime for a political party to put a price on a human life," he added. He also said that the announcement is an indirect way of asking people to lay their lives on the line for money.

Meanwhile, Rajib Jha, a central member of Nepal Sadbhavana Party said persons who get martyred while fighting for their rights should be honored.

Matrika Yadav, coordinator of the CPN-Maoist, said compensation should not be used to attract people to lay their lives on the line. "There is no alternative to going ahead with protests for the rights of the Madhesi people. But people should not be asked to die to protect the vested interests of the leaders," Yadav added.

Anuj Mishra, a youth leader of Madhesi People's Rights Forum, said the decision had been taken in a hurry with a view to garnering people's support. "People have not been very happy with us. So, the Madhes-based parties have made the announcement to make the families, who lost their relatives in the protests, feel better," he added. He, however, said the announcement backfired on the parties.

"People now want the parties to address their genuine grievances rather than compensate them with money." The government had announced Rs 1 million each to 56 families, who lost their family members in the April movement. But most of the families have yet to receive the amount.

Gachchhedhar rejects 7-province model

Madhesi People's Right Forum-Democratic (MPRF-D) has objected strongly to the seven-province federal model proposed by three major political parties.

MPRF-D Chairman Bijay Gachchhedar walked out from the meeting of the Special Committee at the Constituent Assembly Friday, voicing dissatisfaction over the seven-province delineation. Following his walkout, Gachchhedar organized a press conference and said his party would now support the ongoing protests without, however, quitting the constitution-drafting process at the CA.

"The proposal of seven provinces was floated ignoring our demand. We will take to the streets after making our decision public at a press conference in the evening today," said of MJF-D General Secretary Ram Janam Chaudhary.

He said the three major political parties paid no heed to our demand that Jhapa, Morang, and Sunsari should be included into the Tarai Province.

In the height of their arrogance, they floated proposal to merge Kailali and Kanchanpur and Lumbini with the hilly region, said Chaudhary.

MPRF-D Chairman Gachchhadar had boycotted the four-party meeting following the proposal of seven provinces according to which Veri, Rapti, Karnali and Lumbini zones would be included into a new province. Gachchhadar left the meeting saying, "This decision is unacceptable to Tharu community." He had called a press conference at 4 pm today to make his party decision public.

### **Revised draft constitution tabled in CA**

Constitution Drafting Committee Chairman Krishna Sitaula on Sunday tabled the revised draft of the constitution in the CA meeting amid protests by some disgruntled political parties.

The drafting committee revised the draft and converted it into a constitution bill

based on suggestions by top leaders of the major parties. The leaders made changes in the number of provinces and their demarcation. Earlier, the committee had prepared a draft that proposed eight provinces without delineation.

Following feedback on the draft constitution, leaders had decided to go for the six-province model and also drew their boundaries.

As the demarcations of the six-province model sparked protests, they have proposed a seven-province model and asked the drafting committee to revise the draft accordingly.

Some other issues, including citizenship, the dispute over whether or not to declare the country as secular state and electoral threshold have yet to be decided. But the leaders have planned to finalize the provisions through amendments.

"As the CA has received the constitution bill, deliberations on the bill will start in the next CA meeting scheduled for Wednesday," CA chair Subas Nembang said.

Sitaula, while presenting the draft constitution, urged the disgruntled parties not to avoid discussions on the national charter in the CA.

"We can't rightly represent the people by walking out from the CA. We are from different backgrounds and represent different ideologies but the constitution is to be made keeping in view our national responsibility," he said hinting at Madhesi parties that walked out of hall in the middle of the meeting.

Sitaula responded to lawmakers of Rastriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal (RPP-N) in a strongly-worded statement. "We can discuss other things but this CA can't debate over the demand for reinstatement of monarchy," said Sitaula.

## **UDMF demands roadmap to settle disputes**

Agitating United Democratic Madhesi Front (UDMF) has agreed in principle to sit for talks with the major three political parties but it wants the parties to come up with a clear roadmap for addressing the former's demands.

"We are always open for talks but before sitting at the negotiating table we want a clear proposal on how will they address the issues related to the constitution," said Sarvendra Nath Shukla, the general secretary of Tarai Madhes Democratic Party (TMDP).

"We want their views on how they want to settle the issues related to provincial delineation, electoral constituencies, citizenship and proportional inclusion," he added.

On Wednesday, UDMF discussed the government appeal to sit for talks.

Earlier on Tuesday, the three-member team formed by the major parties to hold talks with the agitating Madhes- based parties had separately met with the leaders of the disgruntled parties and urged them to stop blockade at Nepal-India border checkpoints.

The team had met with TMDP Chairman Mahantha Thakur and Madhesi People's Rights Forum-Democratic (MPRF-D) Chairman Bijaya Kumar Gachchhadar and urged them to end the blockade and stop making provocative statements.

During the talks, both the leaders had asked the government to meet their preconditions before starting political negotiations and reiterated that curfew at different places should be lifted and cases against their cadres arrested during the protest should be dropped. Likewise, they had asked for declaring the dead protestors as martyrs as well reparations to their families, and free treatment to the injured.

A meeting of the Nepali Congress (NC), CPN-UML and the UCPN (Maoist) on Monday had formed the talks team comprised of Minister for Forests and Soil Conservation Mahesh Acharya, CPN-UML chief whip Agni Kharel and UCPN (Maoist) Vice Chairman Narayan Kaji Shrestha.

Meanwhile, Wednesday's meeting of UDMF in Rautahat has appealed to the people and organizations in Tarai- Madhes to support their non-cooperation movement against the government. The meeting has urged the people of Tarai-Madhes to stop paying taxes to the government.

The four parties have also condemned the move of some cable operators to stop broadcast of Indian television channels and termed the move as cultural invasion against Madhes.

#### **UDMF says it formed world's longest human chain to protest constitution**

Tens of thousands of people from different districts across the Tarai region led by the United Democratic Madhesi Front (UDMF) on Thursday held hands to form the "longest" human chain along the postal highway in a form of protest against the new constitution.

Locals from Tarai districts enthusiastically joined the peaceful form of protest and formed the human chain along the 1155-km-long highway by joining hands from Mechi to Mahakali, claimed Renu Yadav, central vice- chair of the Federal Socialist Forum Nepal, which is one of the constituent parties of the UDMF.

"We organized this form of protest with a view to draw the attention of the world toward the demands of Madhesi and Tharu people and pile pressure on the government to

address their demands," said Madhesi front leader Yadav.

People including children, youth, women and elderly from villages across the Tarai gathered along the postal highway from 1pm to 3 pm Thursday and held hands to form the human chain, according to Republica correspondents from Saptari, Siraha, Dhanusha, Mahottari, Rautahat, and Parsa.

Rajendra Mahato, chairman of the Sadhbhawa Party, which is a constieunt party of the UDMF joined the human chain in Birgunj, the headquarters of Parsa district.

"This human chain is a symbol of unity and strength of Madhesi and Tharu communities," said Mahato. He further noted that human chain is also a show of people power against the government. Mahato claimed that around 1.5 million people from eastern to western Nepal joined the human chain.

Bal Kishor Yadav, a health worker who provided care and treatment to human chain participants in Bara and Parsa districts expressed surprise over the huge participation of people from all walks of life.

Meanwhile, the organizers have claimed that the 1155 km long human chain formed Thursday is the longest in the world. Earlier, the longest human chain recorded in human history was formed in 2010 was 1,050 km from Bangladesh.

### **Chitwan protests against India's blockade**

Local businessmen, traders, and civil society of Chitwan district on Thursday staged a protest against India's blockade.

The protest led by the Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FNCCI), Chitwan district chapter had started from Narayanghat and

concluded at Chaubis Kothi in Bharatpur.

Kalyan Joshi, chair of FNCCI Chitwan, blamed India for depriving all Nepalis of basic needs by imposing the blockade.

"It is shameful for India to disrespect Nepal's constitution promulgated after a seven-year wait," said Joshi, while appealing India for clearing the blockade immediately and pave way for easy transportation of essential raw materials and resources required in the country.

Subhash Pradhan, a local hotelier, clarified that their protest was against the Indian blockade, not against any other communities, who are currently agitating for justice. "We will continue the protest against India in the coming days as well," said Pradhan.

The participants appealed the government for resolve the blockade through diplomatic channels while warning political leaders against compromising with Indian interference. They particularly urged leaders to make Nepal economically independent to avoid such situations in the future.

**Interview with Thira Bhusal, staff reporter, My Republica.**

**Q: When did you first start your reporting on the political crisis as it was happening? Did you get started on it as it was happening or before it even started and became the big thing that it was. Or did you get on it after it became a serious news story?**

**Bhusal:** We generally – still in Nepal – reporting is still more about happenings and events. First of all we cover the happenings and events and next stage we try

to analyze, comment on those happenings. In newspapers, we mostly give happenings and events and we subsequently give analysis, editorials, face commentaries. This is how we cover the political developments, I mean. That's it.

**Q: So when the Madheshi protests started, what was that coverage like? Can we talk a little about that particular section of coverage?**

**Bhusal:** Yeah. We have local district reporters in each of the 75 districts. So there are 20 to 22 districts in Madheshi region and we have as many local reporters.

First of all, and mostly, we give the report of the local reporters. Then only we run commentaries, analysis and editorials based on those reports in subsequent days. That's how we covered the Madhesh protest and protests in other districts as well.

**Q: And what about the constitution? What was that reporting like?**

**Bhusal:** Constitution – well – the constitution making process was mainly happened in the constituent assembly and it lasted for eight years. This happened in the capital. I was one of the reporters who regularly covered the constitution making process in Kathmandu from inside the constituent assembly.

One part of the reporting was to report what is happening exactly inside the constituent assembly and with several constituent assembly committees working on various themes. We just reported the happenings, discussions deliberations, taking place inside the constituent assembly

First and in the meantime there were some happenings in the districts while the lawmakers were finalizing the constitution in the constituent assembly. There were protests inside the constituent assembly hall as well as in the districts, particularly in the Madhesh region and some other districts as well. There was a huge protest in Madhesh. So the part of protest in districts was reported by the district reporters. And mostly we used the same reports.

And the protest in the constituent assembly hall, that we covered in the centre. So this is how we covered the constitution making process and the debate and discussion for and against it.

**Q: OK. So I will take it piece by piece then. Since we just talked about the constitution, can you tell me a little bit about who were your primary sources for when you were writing, reporting — when you were talking about what was happening in the assembly? Who were your primary sources? Did you do first-person reports? Or did you talk to the ministers? Did you talk to the people who wrote the laws, the legislations? Who were your primary sources?**

**Bhusal:** Primary sources were like – there were several committees – initially there were 11 committees. We covered the committee activities one by one.

When our lawmakers were working on fundamental rights, there was a committee on fundamental rights. That committee worked particularly for the chapter of fundamental rights. So we directly talked to the members of that

committee. Similarly there were several others. There was state restructuring committee and there was committee on finalizing, determining, the form of governance, for example whether to go for presidential system, prime ministerial system, parliamentary system. So there was a specific committee to discuss and draft that chapter. So we directly talked to them. Interestingly, in the initial days, all these reporters were allowed to sit inside with the committees, so we directly observed the discussions, debate and disputes taking place inside the committee meetings. In the final stages we were not allowed to sit inside the meetings. We talked to committee members, because it's not that difficult to talk to the members. The committee sizes were big, like sometimes there were 70 members, sometimes 40, sometimes 10.

Yeah, even the core group team was 10-12 members, so we had multiple sources, so we covered the constitution making process from the right since starting. We had a sort of familiarity with some of the members as well. So they would share what happened inside the committee meetings. And they regularly held press briefings and all these things. When committee meetings would take place, we would wait outside there. When the members go inside the hall and they come outside, we would get updates. And we would update our online versions. At the end of the day, they would brief the pressmen or talk to them over phone, personally, in person, and then we go for the printed editions.

This is how we mostly covered the constitution making process in the constituent assembly. It was more transparent, I think. See, there might have some political deals behind the curtain, but the regular activities taking place inside the assembly was reported in detail. We mainly covered the activities and the views for and against particular provisions and particular chapters of the constitution. That is one of the parts of reporting. And in the meantime constituent assembly committees and lawmakers went to the people seeking public feedback. It was done initially and in the last stage of constitution-making process. They collected public feedback before they prepared the draft and after they prepared the draft. They went to the public seeking feedback on the draft. And we covered those public feedback collection campaigns and we also travelled to far-flung districts to cover those public feedback collections.

So, while covering these events we gave views for and against certain provisions like, the delineation of federal provinces and this Hinduism versus secularism, and this presidential system versus prime ministerial or parliamentary system. Another contentious issue was this citizenship issue. Particularly with regard to giving equal right to women or not. We tried to be realistic while giving views from all sides. In the meantime, we tried to give another source of our reporting: experts of the related fields. We talked to federal experts, lawyers when it comes to discussing about citizenship rights and federal experts and this political science experts. Experts of concerned fields were other sources of our reporting.

**Q: So did you use any other sources apart from the experts and the ministers themselves?**

**Bhusal:** Yes, definitely. When they prepared their draft of the constitution and they were preparing to table it in the constituent assembly committees, we also talked to ministers, leaders from ruling parties ( because role of ruling parties would be central while leading this constituent assembly).

**Q: Couple of points I want to bring up that you mentioned earlier. You said that earlier in the early stages of the writing of the constitution, journalists were allowed to sit with the committee, but not during the final stages. Can you give me a time frame when they were not allowed?**

**Bhusal:** Yes, initially it was journalists were allowed to sit in the committees. But I have to make it clear that they were not allowed to ask questions during the committee meeting. They were just allowed to sit there as observers. They were allowed to record it and allowed to report it, but not interact with the lawmakers. And if there is anything to ask the lawmakers of the committee, they were allowed to do so only after they come out of the committee hall. We took years. More than three years they were working on initial preliminary draft committee so most of the time we were allowed to sit inside the committees. But again, sometimes they may stop journalists citing other reasons like security reasons. (Prime minister, home ministers and defense ministers were inside the committee meeting hall and the committee hall was jam packed.) In principle, journalists

were allowed to sit inside the hall almost over three years. No, even more than that. To be specific it was during only the last few months, that they worked inside the closed door meeting.

**Q: The last few months in 2015?**

**Bhusal:** Yes.

**Q: These journalists who were allowed to sit before, were there also foreign journalist or only local journalists?**

**Bhusal:** Also foreign journalist, but foreign journalists often didn't cover these committee activities and it was too detailed and too... I mean, they might have covered some of the meetings. But foreign journalists were allowed — every journalist was allowed — but they were not seen. I mean, it was too specific and it was not of interest for foreign journalist. Some local Nepali journalists are also working simultaneously for international media. They were there. For example, I also sometimes work for AP. So I mean AP, permanent AP correspondent is here and sometimes I also worked for AP.

Even those local journalists who were also working for international media as part-time journalist or freelancer, they were there. And even if foreign national journalists were there they would be allowed to sit inside the committee meeting.

**Q: You said that they would not always attend those meetings because they were too detailed. Do you think that was an oversight on their [foreign**

**journalist] part? Do you think that they should have done that [attended the meetings] and it would have been better for their coverage?**

**Bhusal:** It would have been better but what happens – particularly what I have observed in Nepal - that international media covered this constitution making process when they take a final decision on certain provisions, like certain committee decided to propose the presidential system in the constitution. Or they decided to dedicate seven or eight provinces, then they would cover the event. Like say “Nepal’s CA committee has proposed 7 provinces for future federal system.” So that decision would come only after months of deliberation inside the committees. They would cover such decisions. For example, if a committee decided to make changes in Nepal’s national flag. They would pick only that topic which is readable for international audience; otherwise they would not cover the details like we did. We local reporters did. For example, when Nepali congress lawmakers were divided whether to go for parliamentary system or not, then we covered the topic in detail. These Nepali leaders are in favour of adopting parliamentary system, while these lawmakers, like 10 lawmakers from the same party, are against that proposal.

We covered in details like these debates. But it was not an issue for the international media. So there was the difference of covering. We covered each and every bits and pieces, each and every discussion, debates and disputes on each

and every provisions. But, it is obvious, it was not an issue for international media.

**Q: When reading about Nepal, you have to understand the political context that's happening behind every decision. But to do that you would have to go into a lot of details. And sometimes people may not go into that kind of details like the local journalists would do. Do you think that was a mistake for the foreign media when they were writing about Nepal that they did not go into a lot of detail?**

**Bhusal:** It definitely would be better if they were able to go into the details behind any decision taken by the constituent assembly committee because international media often covered only the decisions, not the backgrounds, how the decision was taken and what was the context. So it would definitely be better to give the context, background behind taking that decision. But I can't say whether it can be possible or not, but it would definitely be better,

**Q: So, going back a few steps to the Madhesi protest. If the government officials themselves were your sources of information on the constitution, who were your sources for the Madhesi protests?**

**Bhusal:** See, when it comes to covering the constituent assembly, in each political party, small or big, there are lawmakers from Madhesi region. So almost 50 percent lawmakers come from the Madhesh region. Some of them are of Madhesi origin and some are from other ethnic origins. But that lawmaker represents the

Madhes district. We talked to those lawmakers, particularly regional Madhesh political parties who were strongly against some of the provisions. There are around maybe half a dozen regional political parties mainly championing for Madheshi cause like the Madhesei People's Rights Forum, the prime minister's party, and Sanghya-Madhesei Forum.

So these political parties mainly focused their activities for Madhesei causes. It's obvious because they are regional political parties and they project themselves likewise. So, when it comes to covering the dissident's voice, we mainly talked to lawmakers from these political parties. Also there are lawmakers from the Madhesei region representing other major political parties like Nepali Congress, CPN-UML and Maoist Party. We also talked to Madhesei leaders from those political parties. So we talked to multiple lawmakers - I mean multiple sources - to know the deals of Madhesei regional political parties and major political forces when it comes to covering the protest and disputes on certain provisions (for example, on federalism, model of federalism and citizenship, etc.). So we tried to balance it and cover views from all sides. The constituent assembly was a 601-member assembly, so we had plenty of options to cover the views of dissident groups as well. But we mostly tried talking to lawmakers who were closely involved in drafting those certain chapters. Like when a lawmaker is involved in drafting the chapter of citizenship issue then we tried to talk to those particular lawmakers so that we could get the version direct from the dissident lawmakers.

**Q: For the protests - did you only speak to lawmakers or did you also speak to the protesters themselves? Or like just the common man, if you will.**

**Bhusal:** Personally, I was assigned to cover the constituent assembly activities. I talked to mainly lawmakers from all sides, but sometimes there were protests, also in Kathmandu outside constituent assembly hall and some public places. We would go there and cover their protests, their opinions, their speeches. And in the meantime, as I said earlier, our local reporters in the districts, they filed the field reports from local districts. There were multiple sources – local reports from our local reporter, reports from constituent assembly.

Another source was public debates. Regular public debates were taking place in Kathmandu. Civil society members were very actively participating in the constitution-making process. Various expert groups were holding debates, so we would participate, we would attend those discussions. And we covered those events also. We covered these views from experts as well. Similarly we regularly reported for and against certain provisions and we chose experts from all sides – like constitutional experts, lawyers, politicians and political experts. We interviewed experts from all sides, like lawyers who were supporting the Madhesi cause and those who were critical against the agenda.

**Q: And did you also talk to the human rights activists and other citizens?**

**Bhusal:** Yes, we did.

**Q: What about for the economic blockade? When that happened, it must have been a little bit difficult because officials from India would be so tight-lipped about it. So, was that more difficult?**

**Bhusal:** Yes, it was really difficult because Indian side never accepted that the Indian government had any hand in imposing the blockade and only the Nepali side was saying that. They [the Indians] never admitted it. They were saying that local Nepali activists were supplying to these border points. But the impression in Nepal was that it was never possible without support from the Indian side, which directly or indirectly even the Indian side admitted in the later phase. When the Indian officials were not admitting Indian involvement in the blockade, it was neither relief for us.

There was a heated debate in the Indian Rajya Sabha [upper parliamentary house] and other parliamentary forums. Even Indian leaders and Indian experts were criticizing and accusing the Indian establishment of imposing blockade, stopping essential supplies to Nepal. It was a relief for us when such debates were taking place in India. So sometimes we were also selective in covering those events. I have no hesitation to admit that we were selective when Indian leaders, Indian experts were criticizing Indian establishment for obstructing supplying to Nepal.

**Q: Few questions from that. So when you were covering Indian decision-making on the blockade or just the blockade in general, would you talk to the**

**truck drivers themselves on the border, would you talk to the border patrol people?**

**Bhusal:** Our local reporters went there and they talked to the protesters, they talked to truck drivers and those locals who were against the blockade and those who were involved in obstructing the supply. Our local reporters talked to all sides. Our local reporters are mostly from Madhesi community themselves. They are locals so they knew the pain of both sides. You know dissident groups, they're not happy with some of the constitutional provisions and they knew the pain of the people when there was no supply of essential goods. So the local reporters sent the reports talking to all sides.

**Q: And my other question was going to be – you said you were selective in what stories you covered about the Indian officials debates. How would you do that selection process?**

**Bhusal:** We gave the versions of all sides. Like when we were listening to this live debate in the Indian Rajya Sabha, some lawmakers were strongly against obstructing the supply to Nepal while some were saying that no it was due to Nepal's political parties who were protesting along the border side. So definitely we gave more space to those who supported Nepal, who criticized Indian establishment's decision and approach. But we covered the views from other lawmakers as well, like the minister of foreign affairs, Sushma Swaraj. She was repeatedly saying that it was mainly due to Nepal's political parties internal

problem that the situation has worsened. Not because of India. So we gave her voice equally prominently.

**Q: But the preference was always to those who supported Nepal?**

**Bhusal:** Yes, definitely.

**Q: In the last few minutes I want to talk a little bit about foreign coverage. I am sure you must have paid attention to foreign coverage of Nepal when the whole political crisis was happening, to what the foreign newspapers were saying about what was happening in Nepal? I am just curious, what did you think about that coverage?**

**Bhusal:** Mostly people in Nepal followed international media. They found some of the reports were not projecting the real picture. Not all reports, some of the reports, because, see, when it comes to foreign journalists covering a country like Nepal, there are a handful of experts or people who have good access, good rapport with the national media. So foreign journalists depend on the information provided by those people. Sometimes people in Nepal feel that foreign media is sometimes misguided or manipulated by those people because foreign media are dependent on limited local sources.

Local reporters can verify the facts they give with multiple other sources because local reports observe the things, they have been observing developments and turn of events and they can talk to multiple other sources and verify whether the fact is correct or the source is trying to mislead his/her opinion. International journalist

may not be able to cross check. Just for formality, they may take opinion from other sides as well, but can't cross check with multiple sources as local journalist can do.

Sometimes some of the reports is taken as misleading when it comes to covering Nepal's political developments. I am not generalizing all international media, that all international reports are misleading, but sometimes it is felt.

**Q: They are misleading. Anything else that the foreign media doesn't get right about Nepali coverage?**

**Bhusal:** When foreign media covers Nepal issues, my impression is that particularly when Western journalists come to Nepal, they think Nepal is a country of Mt. Everest and the country of Himalayas and country of Gurkhas. They have certain specific images about Nepal. Nepal is more diverse than that. Nepal is certainly a country of mountains. It is also a country of Gurkhas and Himalayas, but this a very limited perception. So when they arrive in Nepal, they find so many things here when they land in Nepal. They get surprised with how things look here on the ground. So these things , these are the factors that they may not be able to cover Nepal rightly. But I must add some of the international journalists, some of the International experts who are studying Nepal, have understood Nepal more than we Nepalis.

Some international journalists who have stayed in Nepal a long time, they have done better journalism than we local reporters. They have travelled a lot, they

have talked to many people and they have studied a lot about Nepal. They have produced very good reports when it comes to journalism and very good study papers on Nepal by other foreign experts. When journalists come for a short time period, they are most likely to be misled by certain groups of people who themselves might be activists for a certain cause. When international journalists come to Nepal to cover for a brief period, they are more likely to be misled. But those experts, those journalists who have stayed in Nepal, they are doing very good study on Nepal. Those who come for a week, or say five or 10 days to cover just a specific issue, like disaster or decision, then they are vulnerable to being misled..

Some reports on those issues are very exaggerating and misleading. Like for example when some of the international reports, immediately after the earthquake were misleading. Those people who were listening or watching television reports immediately after earthquake, they thought that nothing is left in Kathmandu after the earthquake. Earthquake was really devastating. The country still struggling to recover from the earthquake, but it was not like that. Some of the reports gave the impression that not a single building is standing in Kathmandu. Some reports were misleading and exaggerated. Some reports might be distorting.

**Q: The journalists who come in for a short periods of time to report on Nepal, what do you think they can do to make sure that their reports are not misleading and not exaggerated.**

**Bhusal:** Some of them might be misleading; it might not be intentional.

Sometimes it may happen because - sometimes I go for remote districts for reporting on certain assignments. Like I was in a remote western district to cover election activities in 2013. So I always worked with our local reporters, thinking I might get misled with local issues by a local person. For example, if I was working with a local partner, local reporter or other local expert, if the person is misleading, I get misled by the person himself. So it depends on the person you are getting support, information from. You have no choice. You have to depend on the local reporter or local interpreter or local translator or local expert. So it may happen even if the foreign journalist is not misleading – I mean, even if it is not intentional – it may happen. When he /she [the foreign journalist] stays for long time, he can understand things gradually. It's very simple.

**Q: I guess then something the foreign journalists can do is that they can try and talk to different kinds of people?**

**Bhusal:** I mean they have to study. This is a very simple fact but they have to make a study before coming to Nepal. Study who can be resources to talk to, getting permissions, who can be the right persons from multiple sides. If a journalist wants to cover dissidents in Nepal's constitution, he has to talk to at least for five or six sides. Like he or she must talk to Madhesi leaders — even Madhesis there are versions of Madhesi leaders. It is different when you talk to a leader from one particular Madhesi political party, or from one or the other

Madhesi groups. Like some hold moderate views, while some are too radical. You also have to talk to other ethnic groups, you have to talk to major political, other political forces, and, as you said, experts. So sometimes what happens is – it happens also with local reporters — but sometimes what happens is foreign journalists always talk to very limited sources and they make their report.

My other impression is that when the international journalists come to Nepal they try to find some exotic things about Nepal. It's not only about the constitution-making process, other things. They try to find exotic things that are sale-able to an international audience. What is realistic, what is the real thing that might not be saleable. So sometimes they try to spice up the things. They have to at least cover readable things and sale-able stories.

**Q: One last point that I wanted to bring up. So do you see that there is a difference in how foreign (western) journalists cover Nepal and how Indian journalists cover Nepal?**

**Bhusal:** Yes, definitely. When it comes to understanding culture and other things, Indians always have the luxury of language because a large section of people can understand Hindi. So they can also ask questions in Hindi and some of the respondents may answer them in Hindi. Sometimes they can understand the question in Hindi and they can reply in Nepali. So language benefit is there for Indian journalists. Then people from the origin similar to Indian ethnic groups like – I am not saying Indian, but similar to ethnic groups – like you can find

people like Yadav, Thakkurs, Chowdhuri and these people from these groups are commonly found in Nepal, like in India. They are from similar cultural background and linguistic background. So Indians always have that benefit, luxury when working in Nepal. But when Western journalists come here, they might face some linguistic barriers and find some difficulty in understanding some cultural things. So definitely Indian journalists can do better. When you land in Kathmandu you feel like you are in one of the states of India. Like you see posters of Bollywood films and the same script, Devnagari script, and people with similar complexion. Indians always can do better if they work sincerely on reporting. I don't mean that they are not working sincerely, they do. They have linguistic and cultural benefits, so they can do better when they work honestly.

**Q: Is there anything else you want to add that I missed out that I should focus on, that you want to mention?**

**Bhusal:** My impression, in a gist, is that international journalists have produced very good, very comprehensive, very realistic reports that we really follow, that we try to learn something from — international reports in video, print or online. And sometimes we find that some international reports do not correctly reflect Nepal's reality. I think it happens not only with Nepal. It happens when you studying in other countries as well. So it can be avoided. Again to repeat, some international journalists have produced very comprehensive, very good reports be it on the royal massacre, Maoist conflict, constitution making and all these things.

On all issues. But sometimes, often, we find some misleading reports that do not rightly reflect Nepal.

**Interview with Subhash Ghimire, editor, My Republica.**

**Q: Just to give you a little bit of background I am doing my thesis on difference in coverage between local journalists in Nepal and foreign journalists who came to report on the constitution and the Madhesi protest and the blockade by India. And I want to look at how the coverage differed between these two sets of journalists. And to that end I am interviewing journalists in Nepal and I am trying to find foreign journalists who also came to Nepal or reported about Nepal from a distance.**

**How I am going to structure this is: I am going to ask you about your reporting, and Republica's reporting on everything that happened starting in August and then how you felt foreign journalists did that coverage.**

**Ghimire:** I think, to start it's not just Republica, other major dailies here in Nepal had their own set of views on constitution to start with. For example we said that the constitution has to be promulgated on time. But then you know that whatever concerns that some of these groups had to be addressed. That has been our stance throughout. And some others said you know maybe it's a good idea to put the process on hold, bring them on board and then promulgate [the constitution] at a later date. But then they went ahead and passed the constitution. But then soon after that there was a big protest in the south. But then I think a lot of the facts

were twisted. A big narrative in the south was that the Madhesis has been treated as second class citizens in the new constitution, which is obviously not true, you know. So I think the narrative afterwards played a huge role in terms of inciting violence in the protest for extended period of time. If you also look at, for example, the coverage of Al Jazeera, they were I think quite biased on that front reporting from Janakpur and bunch of other places. They were acting as if Kathmandu is greatly ignoring the demands and the constitution is biased. So I think they actually helped flamed the fire in the protest.

And I think there was sadly a lot of these journalists who came in to cover, few of them, they I think bought into that narrative that Al Jazeera successfully sort of worked on from the ground. So I think that the journalists would come and subscribe to that report and stay one or two days and then leave.

Some of these international reporters who are stationed here in Kathmandu, they are very close knit. It's kind of murky that they have very close relations with the embassies, with the development agencies from their respective countries. It's kind of sad the kind of circle they have around these people. And they all back the same narrative. And so obviously it doesn't help when you want to report based on facts and reality on the ground. I think they twisted a lot facts during the time. And also in terms of the blockade, we were the very first paper that basically broke the story on blockade. So we [My Republica] have both Nepali and English dailies here. Both the papers were there in calling out the blockades. But then if

you look at international media, there was hardly any mention of the Indian blockade because, I mean, this WAS an Indian blockade. There's no doubt about it. But they say, no it's the Madhesi protesters. But the Madhesi have been protesting for two months before the blockade, and there was no blockade then, but as soon as the constitution was passed and India wasn't very happy with the constitution, then they imposed the blockade. So it was straightforward. But they colour it in a way that looks like the Madhesis were at the forefront. After the end of the blockade, we interviewed a bunch of Madhesi leaders and they actually admitted that it was actually India's blockade. But then you look at the editorials in The New York Times or the stories in a bunch of international papers, they hardly mentioned the Indian blockade. They blame the government for not addressing the demands of the Madhesis. So it was really sad to see that the facts were twisted by the journalists.

**Q: You mentioned earlier that Al Jazeera was reporting from the ground.**

**And were they the first of foreign publications to be there?**

**Ghimire:** I am not sure, I need to check, but I am guessing, I think that they were the first ones because they have their people stationed here who visited the south and started reporting on that.

**Q: You mentioned earlier that you were the first paper in Nepal to report on the blockade. Before the blockade we had the constitution and then we had the protests. Can you talk a little bit about the coverage process for that?**

**Ghimire:** So our paper has correspondents in every single district around the country. So we get reports from these reporters. We also have like regional headquarters. We publish papers from different places in the country. They actually send us the information. We actually get all this information from across the places and then we verify from my own source from here in Kathmandu as well, so it's a combination of lot of these fact-checking and reports from different individuals from different parts of the country. So even if one person tries to twist this, you have check and balance. That way you're much better at picking out the facts. But then I think towards the very beginning of the protest, we were much more focused on the constitutional process here in Kathmandu. So in the first few weeks we didn't really pay much attention to the protests. While we did cover the footage, we did not take much attention to the protest in the south which was going on for a while. But it was only after the constitution and after India's blockade that we really focused on reporting on the protests. I think most of the major newspapers in Kathmandu were focused on the constitution and its processes, then the protest in the South.

**Q: I spoke to Thira a few days ago and he told me that during the reporting of the constitution, the first few years reporters were allowed to sit in on the discussions with the ministers but then it became closed – those discussions became closed in the last few months of the constitution. So what did you think of that closing to the journalists? Did you think that was right?**

**Ghimire:** Definitely not. I don't think it was completely closed. I think that some of the sessions of these different committees were probably closed for different reasons. But I think most of the discussions were open and our reporters were there to report on these developments. But I think towards the end because there was a lot of jockeying around, the leaders sitting together to decide on some of these things which probably weren't carried out in a manner that they should be, so I think that they allowed the reporters to be there in the discussions. But I think largely, throughout the process, reporters were allowed in. They were reporting from the parliament on every aspect of the discussions.

**Q: And do you know if any foreign journalist paid attention to that aspect?**

I don't think so. We didn't really see much of the reporting before the constitution. Just the journalists from within Nepal.

**Q: While reporting on the constitution, the protests and the blockades, what was your sourcing process. Who would your primary sources be? Who would your secondary sources be?**

**Ghimire:** To start with we have your own reporters for information, but then because you have access to basically anyone in the country, if you feel like you should double-check, I could basically just call those people and verify the information. But we didn't have to do that much except for during the blockade as the Indian embassy people, Indian consulate and people involved — like the protestors, the leaders who were leading the protest — ... We tried to get as much

information as possible from them. So for example we were also very first paper to break the story on this: political parties that were actually involved in the smuggling of fuel from India to Nepal. We would go and confront these leaders. They would obviously deny everything, but our reporter had photographs and videos of the whole activities there. So your major sources are always your reporters, but if there are any doubts, then you can use your own contacts.

**Q: Apart from using their own photographs, their own footage, who would your primary sources for your reporters be?**

**Ghimire:** Because our reporters were on the ground, like in the protest along the border, they would have firsthand access to the protestors, to the political party leaders, to the government officials on the ground. So I think you get first-hand information from the ground from all the sources. And then if you need some information from people in offices in Kathmandu, there will be another set of reporters who can get the information.

**Q: So it wasn't always the same journalist who got in touch with different people for the same story?**

**Ghimire:** Yes it was a bunch of journalist who were on these stories.

**Q: I see. While you were covering these three big major topics, did you notice that there were any related but smaller — maybe not smaller, but not as noticed — events that were taking place simultaneously that also needed coverage but weren't getting as much attention?**

**Ghimire:** I don't know about around these times, but I am sure like just before the earthquake there was a big epidemic in western Nepal, an outbreak on which we were reporting. We sent the people, but then the earthquake happened and our attention shifted very quickly. During the blockade, we reporting a lot on the humanitarian crisis in different parts of the country, be it the lack of medicine, blood and essentials, other than that I don't recall any major incidents happening.

**Q: You mentioned earlier that Al Jazeera created a narrative, and that was what most international journalist who came after, that was what they followed. Can you talk a little bit more about how Al Jazeera established that narrative. You talked a little bit about it before, but could you go more into detail?**

**Ghimire:** Al Jazeera's correspondent, she was seemed to be a lot more sympathetic to the people in the south. She's a Nepali. When the protests started, they [Al Jazeera] were reporting on a daily basis from the ground, and most of the time their reports would focus on the killings by the police, and not much about the protesters or their vandalism and their violence. It was pretty obvious for us here in Kathmandu to see that bias. And also, sadly, a lot of this narrative was driven by Nepali-origin journalists. Like journalists in India who were of Nepali origin, they were sympathetic to the protests going on in the south. They would drive that narrative in Indian media, which was even picked up by different media. So I think it was a combination of these. And when these international

journalists come in, they get in touch with these people and they build onto that narrative. But it was surprising you know that a lot of these journalists, many a times like New York Times, BBC, CNN, all these reporters they would call me and I would give them whatever information I had, but in the end they made their own narrative. So it was kind of surprising. It was really suffocating for us to see that none of this big international media was actually exclusively reporting on the blockade. Because the Nepali-origin journalists were saying this was not actually an Indian blockade, but it was blockade imposed by the Madhesis in the south. So the argument within Nepal was so divided. Not so much within Nepal, but these people living outside. That, I think, didn't help to have this unified voice in international media. And then obviously because of this, India could go on with this blockade for five and a half months.

**Q: Right. And India itself was saying that no – we are not behind it so that was also not the conflicting voice.**

**Ghimire:** And then after the end of blockade at one point India actually did accept that it was in fact Indian blockade.

**Q: Did you see any reaction from international media correcting themselves when India made that announcement?**

**Ghimire:** I don't think so. It's all about the economy. It's [Nepal] a pretty insignificant country in terms of the narrative that... there are two giant countries here to the north and the south of our border. I mean, you would think that

whatever happens in Nepal should be big news but unfortunately I don't think anyone paid close attention to what India said. And I think also some of these international big media outlets, they probably didn't want to challenge the Indian establishment because it is driven by the economy and what not, so I think we end up suffering for no reason.

**Q: Do you think that if the other international media had paid maybe more attention to what local journalists were also saying and less attention to just the Al Jazeera narrative, things might have been different?**

**Ghimire:** Oh for sure, I think that would have made a big pressure on India to lift the blockade much earlier than they actually did. So it would have made a huge difference, no doubt about that.

**Q: Apart from talking more to local journalists and not following one narrative, what do you think other foreign journalists could have done better in their coverage of Nepal and the political crisis?**

**Ghimire:** For sure I think they should have come out of that particular circle, particular set of journalists who had good connections prior to the crisis because whoever comes in from New York Times or BBC or CNN, they have already had established their prior connections with these people, the foreign correspondents living in Kathmandu, living in Nepal.

Lot of these people are interrelated in the sense that some of their husbands, wives, they work for the embassy or their husbands are doing consultancy work

with the embassies. So it is all very interrelated. And then they have their own hanging out places, their own set of people who subscribe to the same value system, who subscribe to the same thinking processes, so theirs becomes a different world. And when these journalists come in, obviously they are their first point of contact, and they have already made up their mind about the stories. It becomes hard for them to also probably get out of that and build their own sources and try to understand what really is happening on the ground. And I think time is of the essence. You know, you come and spend few days to report and you don't have enough time to go around and get the facts straight.

**Q: But given that you don't have the time to go around and get the facts straight, what do you think journalists can do to make sure that they try and get as much right as they can?**

**Ghimire:** I think, to start with, it's really important to sort of understand what is happening in the country, what are the different voices saying. There are very few big media in Nepal. There are like only two or three dominant English daily papers and two to three dominant Nepali daily papers. It's not hard to see what they are thinking, what they are writing. Get in touch with their reporters or the editor and sort of really understand what is happening. Then you could probably just travel. This place is what's happening on the ground. It's really... If you think about it, it's not hard, but for some reason it does not happen that way and they [foreign journalists] do whatever they want to do and report on the way they want.

**Q: Ok. What else do you think should be relevant that I should be paying attention to when I am talking to journalists? What can be done to make foreign coverage better?**

**Ghimire:** I think talking to a lot of people and checking a lot of voices. I think the best way is to read local papers and talk to local journalists and reporters on the ground. If there are different voices, try to understand why that's happening and go back and try to understand the history behind it. For example, the blockade. It looks plain and simple: "Oh the people in the south must have done it because they are not happy with the constitution." But the Madhesi-based parties were involved in the whole process until the last minute. They pulled out in the last minute. Why did they do that? You can disagree with a document, but then it was passed by more than 90 percent of the members of the parliament, of the assembly. So if you are talking about the processes and the democratic framework, what do you do? You can't have 100 percent. You can't have everyone on board on anything. And it's pretty shocking that some of these very people that understood these processes, understood the whole system they came out and said "No it's not my constitution." I think it's morally wrong for these people to say that because you voted, you sent your representatives, they made their mind, they voted, so how could this not be your constitution? You can disagree with lot of things but you can't say this is not my constitution. They started burning the documents like you will never have a document. You really need to understand why these things are happening and what are the causes and

factors and who are people involved in it. It really helps a journalist get their facts.

**Q: On that point though, it can also be argued that – ok you go to people you already know and then you get another perspective, how do you vet which is the most factual perspective? You can get two conflicting ideas. Like for example the blockade – India is saying no we are not the one's who instigated it, but you have the protesters saying no – it is India. How do you verify which is the factual story in this particular instance, and then in a more general sense**

**Ghimire:** I think in the blockade, if you go to the ground and see what's happening on the ground, you can easily figure out who's behind the blockade. There were a couple of incidents during the time, for example, 500-plus trucks from India were stranded on the Nepal side. The border police on both sides agreed that they will let these pass and they let that 500 trucks from India cross the border. As soon as the trucks from Nepal passed, then the protesters started pelting stones at the police and they blocked the border. So it's pretty obvious who was behind that. I think some of the incidents you could tell the story, but generally speaking, if you have conflicting information you could probably also make your mind after talking to multiple sources and multiple people and being on the ground. I think one can figure out what's happening in there. I mean, it's

always not clear cut but a lot of time, from different incidents, you could probably figure that out.

**Q: One last question on sourcing again. Apart from the official sources that the foreign journalists can go to, and local journalists, how do you think foreign journalists can better get in touch with other types of sources? Especially taking into consideration that there might be a language barrier, there might not be a fixer available. How do you think we can get over that?**

**Ghimire:** I think sometimes social media is a pretty good indicator. Like what's happening on Facebook, Twitter and a bunch of other social networks. It gives you some idea of the narrative that's building and different ideas being contested. Sometimes even the expat community can also give you some information on what's happening on the ground. And then at the end of the day you have to be on the ground. You have to really understand what's happening on the ground and get that information.

**Interview with Krishna Pokharel, reporter, Wall Street Journal (India).**

**Q: For the coverage of Nepal, were you a parachute journalist or were you a foreign reporter?**

**Pokharel:** I'm a Nepali citizen. But I've been based in Delhi [India] for the last 10 years. I think of myself as both Nepali journalist and foreign journalist. In many ways, I do look at Nepal like how reporters would look at their own country and also from New Delhi basis, which is kind of... I have the unique vantage point

to look at Nepal because in many ways New Delhi influences policies and politics in Nepal. Yeah, New Delhi has an outsize influence in Nepal, in all aspects, economics, politics.

**Q: As the constitution was being written and the protests were happening, at what point did you tell Wall Street Journal “We need to pay attention to the political crisis happening in Nepal. It’s important,”?**

**Pokharel:** Most of our coverage is focused in India. Sometimes you really have to press hard to get the immediate editors’ attention to Nepal. The news event has to be really big, has to have some regional dimension or something to do with India. Obviously with the constitution issues, people in the south who are Madhesis are against the constitution and they’ve been demanding restructuring of the federal boundaries. And this also the ethnic group in Nepal that is culturally very close to the people in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar [two states in India]. They are seen as being supportive of them. When there was a blockade last year [2015] in Nepal, there was a lot of diplomatic back and forth between India and Nepal about who actually imposed that blockade. All of these stories were covered. Otherwise when things are calm and when things are as usual in Nepal... when I say as usual, there were news events that might be monumental for the people in Nepal, but they might be of no consequence to our audience back home and they might not get covered. When you’re working for a foreign publication, you have to keep in mind the audience you’re supposed to write for. And you have to use

your own journalistic judgment to whether that particular news event matters or not.

**Q: I looked at the Journal's coverage of Nepal from August through December 2015. And the first August article I found was the one that you wrote about the officials agreeing to divide the country into six states. Was that the first politically related article that you wrote on Nepal? I'm not counting the coverage that you might have done for the earthquake and aid efforts. I'm talking about any article you wrote on the political crisis alone in nepal - anything related to the constitution, or the protests or the economic blockade.**

**Pokharel:** I've been writing for the Journal since 2007. My first article on Nepal was sometime in late 2007. If you closely follow the political developments in nepal, then one of the conditions for the Maoist rebels to come to the political mainstream was related to the constitution, basically, in throwing out the old constitution and bringing in the new constitution that would institutionalise a republican form of government. All those coverage ranging from late 2007 until now have one way or the other related to all these issues. In a way, things started getting into culmination in August last year. When it seemed like there is going to be a constitution, there was a flare-up of violence in the south when the main political parties decided to state there will be six federal states. The people in the south were not happy and then that's how the new spiral of violence began.

**Q: But the article that I specifically mentioned, was that the first article that was published about the political crisis after the earthquake?**

**Pokharel:** I believe so, yeah.

**Q: When you're writing your articles, how are you gathering your sources? I took a look at about 10 articles that were written about Nepal in the August to December 2015 period and, except for one article, all the sources are official sources. Could you talk me through your sourcing process? Did you go to Nepal while covering these stories or were they all covered from Delhi?**

**Pokharel:** All the stories were written from New Delhi, basically. I've always tried to talk to the officials directly, be it from the political parties or from the government or from the non-governmental sources. I always tried to bring them on record rather than making them anonymous. Most of those sources were also cultivated from a long time back. Like politicians from these political parties in the south, Madhesi parties, I know them — not personally, but as a journalist, as my sources. Reaching out to the governmental spokesmen, most of them are... their contact details are easily available on government websites. If their direct numbers are not available, you try their official numbers and eventually reach them.

**Q: The officials that you already knew, they were from when you were growing up in Nepal?**

**Pokharel:** All those main politicians, main characters, I grew up knowing them, hearing about them.

**Q: Did you ever want to use human rights activists or subject experts or more citizens as sources, but were not allowed to, or it was cut from the story because it would not resonate with a global audience? Did that ever happen?**

**Pokharel:** Yeah, that happens sometimes. It doesn't happen because it doesn't resonate with a global audience, but because of... there are times when certain voices, certain experts that we have in a story but it gets cut from our print editions because of the obvious space issue. But those things are still kept in the online versions of the story. There were also times when there is some kind of gatekeeping that happens everywhere in the editing process. If you see my earlier stories, you'll see many subject experts, human rights experts, and those kind of people who know what's what. But you also put in your own journalistic observations instead of somebody else's who would have their own biases, their own standpoint.

**Q: How would you bring in your perspective seeing as you were in Delhi? As a Nepali you have an insight most foreign journalists may not, but how would you bring in that perspective while still being objective?**

**Pokharel:** As a journalist you have to keep these values: to be balanced, to be objective. But sometimes it really gets complicated, to be honest. Being in Delhi, sometimes you'd realise that things get really overbearing. There are times when you tend to be opinionated and I write editorials. But even when I write editorials, I keep in mind that I'm a reporter first. There was a particular development in 2010 or 2011 when New Delhi had stopped the newsprints for Nepal's largest

daily publication, Kathmandu Media House. I talked to the journalists over there. I got a sense that the Indian ambassador to Nepal at the time was so powerful at the time that he was seen as the new king of Nepal. It's only in those moments when you're trying to break the complete story, but in that process you get caught in that whirlwind of opposite forces. Then you feel that okay, it happened to you because you're also a Nepali. But even during those coverage, I was waiting for those moments to pass, calm down, and look at the event, voices, as neutrally, balanced and objectively as I could.

**Q: So, the event would pass and then you would write about it, so you could be objective and balanced?**

**Pokharel:** Yes.

**Q: And you've been doing that in your entire coverage of Nepal, right from the very beginning in 2007?**

**Pokharel:** Yes. Unless it's breaking news. Most of our stories are more analytical and we tend more towards analysing the event than just reporting them. We bring new perspectives and new angles.

**Q: Were there any stories that you wanted to cover about Nepal during the August to December 2015 period but could not because it either didn't have that India spin to it, or it wasn't significant enough for a global audience?**

**Pokharel:** There were a few stories that I wanted to report on, on the whole Madhesi sentiment, the whole Madhesi issue. But I would rather blame myself because I was thinking about other stories to cover out of India.

**Q: Can you give me a few examples of those stories you wanted to write, but couldn't?**

**Pokharel:** Most of those stories were about how Nepal was handling the Madhesi issue, how there was the growing distance between them. One of the stories that I really wanted to do was how because of the failure of the main political parties to do the main constitution-making process in the right way, how that was bringing tensions between Nepali people, mainly between the people in the hills and in the south. I think that was the main story I wanted to write on because that is a story that has not been told that well by any publications as of now. I think the Madhesi issue has been so completely swept to one side mostly by the Madhesi intellectuals who happen to be of the upper middle class, upper caste. In the process, the large Madhesi populace is kind of being used as a political pawn by certain groups and individuals.

That is not to say that the southern plains of Nepal has not been marginalized or has not been looked down upon by the hills. There has been a history of discrimination against the people in Madhes, especially those in the economically backward sections, and traditionally in the lower caste hierarchies. But the Madhesi debate that has gotten attention right now is just about centered around few points like having two distinct federal states for Madhes, having equal naturalized citizenship, having access to higher political posts in Nepal and few issues like that. I think it's still a political tinder box and I think we have room to engage with that story in a more deeper, meaningful way.

**Q: Local publications haven't touched on this?**

**Pokharel:** Sadly, not in a way I would say in a fair or balanced way. They've tossed up all these topics, but the writers' or journalists' biases would come, depending on where they come from or the political spectrum they come from, not in a way you would expect from a journalist.

**Q: As a journalist of Nepali origin working for a foreign publication, do you feel you've had an advantage over other foreign journalists?**

**Pokharel:** Definitely. I can understand the Nepali psyche better. As a young man growing up in Nepal, going to college in Delhi, I've always believed national boundaries as more of a barrier to a better world. I have a sense of attachment and detachment which comes into play when I'm covering Nepal. I think it applies to India as well, my adoptive home after home.

**Q: Did you think you had any disadvantage because you were of Nepali descent?**

**Pokharel:** Many times you take things for granted. That's why foreign journalism is still relevant because there are times when you get so used to a particular way or thinking or a particular way of things happening that you no longer think it newsworthy. I think that mentality comes into play when you're invested in a particular story, especially when you happen to be of that place. That I think is the biggest disadvantage.

Also, the officials when they know you're one of them, they have the tendency to take white-skinned journalists more seriously. People here are still in awe of

Westerners. If you're brown-skinned, even if you speak their language, they don't take you as seriously as they do Western journalists even if they don't speak the language.

**Q: When the blockade happened, how was that covering it from the Indian perspective when there were some parties saying it was India who imposed it and others saying it wasn't. Even in Nepal there was that divide. So, what was it like covering the blockade?**

**Pokharel:** If you were to be just an observer, it was very clear that India was supporting the Madhesis, and that the blockade wouldn't have gone as long and wouldn't have had as much impact if India had not cooperated with or supported the Madhesis. It was clearly a blockade that was supported by India, but at the same time you have to have that other perspective. There were Madhesi protesters saying "We're doing it." Nepali officials saying it's India, India is saying it's not us, the Madhesis saying it's them. We tried to maintain the logical sequence.

**Q: Is there anything you'd like to add?**

**Pokharel:** As a foreign journalist writing for a foreign publication, you bring in context, background and all that to the daily coverage of local publications which lacks context. But you respect every word that they publish.

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