

Proceedings Report

Post Disaster Assessment: Blockade 2015/16

20 June 2016

Speaker:

Mr. Chandrakishore Jha, Journalist and Political Commentator

Dr. Mallika Shakya, Advisor, Nepal Economic Forum and Professor at South Asian University

Mr. Rabindra Adhikari, Chairman, Parliamentary Development Committee

Dr. Surendra Labh, Social Researcher and Political Commentator

Moderator:

Sujeev Shakya, Chairperson, Nepal Economic Forum

In the past year Nepali economy faced multiple challenges that clogged the country in a devastating manner. The April and May 2015 earthquakes, which claimed close to 9,000 lives and injured more than 22,000 inflicted enormous costs - an estimated USD 7 billion - on the economy and is expected to push close to 700,000 people below the poverty line. Months following this, constitution based protests in the Terai-Madhes region, which capped into border blockades came as another major setback to the economy, and the society at large with vital supplies to the landlocked country disrupted.

In order to delve into this crisis and to assess the impact of the blockade, Alliance for Social Dialogue (ASD) and Nepal Economic Forum (NEF) jointly organized this moderated panel discussion, which brought together insights from professionals residing in Terai-Madhes, academicians, and legislators. The report “Post Disaster Assessment: Blockade 2015-16” was released during the event. As the media highlighted only the immediate impacts of the blockade, the study explores the longer term implications of the blockade which are much more complex and adverse.

From The Panel

Panelist Chandrakishore Jha brought forward that during the protests in Birgunj, small medium enterprises (SME's) operating in the affected areas were double-crossed by both the government as well as the protestors. The government was against the SME's supporting the protests, while the protestors promised them refunds and additional benefits for joining the protests, which were not met. This left the SME's in a tight spot of bother.

In regards to Nepal being independent and protecting itself from further harmful shocks, Rabindra Adhikari stressed on the importance of trade and transit diversification. He stated that diversification of trade and transit and a move away from overt dependence on a single trading partner for essential commodities was of utmost importance if Nepal is to have sovereignty. He also stated that lack of preparation, poor mobilization of relief efforts and a dismal effort towards reconstruction left the country in a position which was worse than the post-earthquake phase.

The emergence, acceptance and blossoming of the black market in the country was a key point discussed throughout the discussion. Dr. Surendra Labh brought an interesting overview regarding the black market prevalent in Nepal. He put forth the notion that there is a sense of social acceptance towards black marketers and the dangers of that becoming the dominant norm in the society. He talked about how corrupt attitudes are accepted in our society and how our socialization process acknowledges people geared towards materialism. He also talked about how different categories of people perceived the blockade differently claiming that it is important to view the blockade as a by-product of the discord brewing in the Terai-Madhes.

Dr. Malika Shakya noted that in context to the black market prevalent in the country, the corrupt elite has seized and altered the informal economy's ways of operation to extract financial gains out of this situation. Chandrakishore Jha supported this by stating that the black-market thrived due to the protection provided by the state to key players of the black market.

What Can Be Done?

Bi-lateral ties with India and trade diversification were the major points of discussion throughout the event, while integration of different geographic regions and ethnicities was also brought up multiple times. Chandrakishore Jha mentioned that social relations should be viewed as a key capital in the economy. He pronounced that the state has been Kathmandu-centric, which is exemplified by the fact that during the blockade, getting supplies to Kathmandu was viewed as the priority while the plight of the border towns were ignored.

Rabindra Adhikari identified the postal highway in Terai as a major dynamic in national integration, highlighting that infrastructural connectivity should play a key role for integrating different geographic regions and thereby promoting overall national integration. Dr. Malika Shakya provided her views from India and stressed on the need to view the blockade ordeal through the lenses of 'Southasianess'. She brought forward the importance in understanding the difference in perception of the blockade from the capitals vis-à-vis the border towns.

To view the full report, [click here](#).

To view the policy briefs, [click here](#).

Nepal Economic Forum is a not-for-profit organization initiated by beed and aimed at becoming Nepal's premier private sector led economic policy and research institution.

Alliance for Social Dialogue aims to promote dialogue within Nepal on a variety of issues, including but not limited to the promotion of democratic values and institutions in Nepal.

neftalk is a platform for policy discourse and discussion on pertinent economic issues