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A ray of hope in Nepal

Sanjaya Gajurel

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When I left Nepal for US fourteen years ago, I was utterly hopeless about this country. Nepal being a victim of rampant corruption, nepotism, unmanaged processes, unethical behavior and megalomania in people, I didn't expect to see any change during my recent visit. However, I saw a ray of hope after witnessing improvement in different sectors. After all, it has to happen when its two giant neighbors, India and China, have booming economic growth with annual rates of about 7% and 9% respectively.

Machine Readable Passport (MRP), a travel document having optical encoded characters in the identity page, was one of the most discussed topics while in the US, with Nepalese expressing frustrations and bitter experiences to obtain one. International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has set November 24, 2015 as the deadline for handwritten passport. This has put tremendous pressure on the only authorized passport issuing department, Department of Passport (DoP), to replace the passport for estimated 3.5 million migrants on top of releasing new passports for exodus of new migrants. Due to a lack of manpower and capacity, there was news about people waiting in queues for even days to get it. If Nepalese embassies had informed about the deadline via emails much earlier, this situation could have been averted in the first place. Still, the process of obtaining MRP in Nepal must have improved drastically as I obtained it without much hassle.

When I entered the Department of Passport, there was a big board scrawled with checklist, but there was no information about where to obtain the form. As a Nepali, it is assumed that we can figure it out after inquiring here and there. The form had to be downloaded from the website which included a template and information about filling the form. Since most Nepalese do not have computer, Internet, or printer, paying rupees 250 for preparing the form through one of the sprawling service vendors seems to be a better option. It shuns the headache of missing documents and inconsistencies in paperworks. Anyway, you are already paying 5000 rupees for general and 10000 rupees for urgent application.

Since there was no pre-information about the windows to submit the form, I had to get it from the vendor – window 5 for citizenship verification. I was there at 10 am sharp. The office hour is posted as 10 to 12 noon. I was expecting the window to be opened not earlier than 11:30am, the "Nepali time". To my surprise, the window opened at 10:15am and within 15 minutes, my citizenship was verified. The next stop was window 7A, which was already open though there were people in a queue. I saw notices posted by the windows but people were still inquiring about the same thing. So, the system has habituated to get information through inquiries.

Though the process was flowing fine, few were offering bribe to get it done quicker. Unexpectedly, their application got processed almost about the same time. The only difference was that they did not have to follow one window after the other. Again, the system has made us believe that it is still broken and kickback is necessary to get the job done. The whole process did not take more than a couple of hours, though there was much room for improvement which could have let the department to serve more people in a day.

For the payment of urgent application, we had to go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I decided to take chances. Even if I reached there on time, my application may not have been considered. Nonetheless, the

Opinion



A ray of hope in Nepal

What I saw during my recent visit was that a process has indeed been established in Nepal's administration; there is now a need to refine it, which is mostly about common sense, i.e. not much effort is required for this.

If the existing disbelief in the system can be restored, we can expect better Nepal in few years.

It is not that people in US and other developed countries are different. It is the system which binds them, and which is resilient even to political upheavals.

Sanjaya Gajurel



Hitting the fanatics where it hurts the most

The movie is full of all the emotions ranging from fun and joy to loss and despair. Makes you laugh all the times with brief moments prodding serious soul-searching in between. ... The movie hits them where it hurts the most, yet leaves very little space to be attacked in response.

Jiwan Kshetry

Blog



Some seats for women

I grew up in a culture where men are taught to spread their legs, extend their arms wherever and whenever. Men take a lot of space and intrude on it every time. Women are taught to squeeze and to learn to shrink. Imagine how difficult it is for a woman to share the little available space with a man in a crowded vehicle and stand?

Pritisha Pandey

More this is

well-managed line proved me wrong again. There were people from all around the country, some even from the remote villages. I inquired them about the reason behind coming to the capital going through all the adversities when they could have applied and collected their passports from the distribution centers at district administration offices. The answer was uncertainty of receiving the passport on time in the districts. The pragmatic option could have been an on site verification and assurance from distribution centers in respective villages.

I found notices about date, time, and what to bring to get MRP. The payment receipt also contained such information as the window label and the serial number. But people were trying to figure out the respective window and their position in the line. They were not aware of the first come, first served system and could not realize that the serial numbers were merely for identification purpose.

There was yet another sector where I saw improvement. The recent SAARC preparation in Kathmandu has also proved that lots of things can happen through concerted effort and willingness. Still, the maintenance piece is missing as other systems in Nepal. It is, therefore, a big leap which has casted a ray of hope in Nepalese.

The MRP processes, for instance, could have been much better without significant effort. It won't take much to make information and checklist available, so service-seekers could avoid unnecessary inquiries about what to do and where to go next. Tokens could be given and forms submitted from the same window. So, instead of rushing up and down and overcrowding, one could have waited for his/her number to be called. The payment could also have been made on site instead of going to Ministry of Foreign Affairs. If the information in the payment receipt had been informed or well communicated, there would not have any chaos at MRP distribution center.

What I saw during my recent visit was that a process has indeed been established in Nepal's administration; there is now a need to refine it, which is mostly about common sense, i.e. not much effort is required for this. If the existing disbelief in the system can be restored, we can expect better Nepal in few years. It is not that people in US and other developed countries are different. It is the system which binds them, and which is resilient even to political upheavals.

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**NOW THIS IS
embarrassing, a
girl rode past
me!**

In 2011, I was working for a reputed media house. The first thing I noticed there was that the media house was a men's world, but so are most places in Nepal.

Abha Dhital

Readers Column

A letter to our Honorable Prime Minister

Lighting up the capital was not an end but a beginning towards infrastructure development, implementing the power treaties, scaling the economies upwards, and to write the constitution on time.

State of denial

Nanda Parsad Adhikari's painful death has raised a fundamental question to our political / legal system. Is this what we wanted? What does a "federal democratic republic" means for a common people?

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