

BUSINESS



Bal Krishna Thapa / THT

RENDEZVOUS
'Better public service delivery system only can address discontentment, dissatisfaction of people'

The National Planning Commission (NPC) has sought government's permission to implement pilot project on integrated human settlement in Bajura. How fast can the pilot project be rolled out?

The prime objective of integrated human settlement project is to develop safer settlements. Such settlements should also provide effective and quality public services at minimum cost. We believe settlements should not only provide shelter, but basic services and ensure safety of people living there. Against this backdrop, we recently conducted a study on integrated settlement based on the directive issued by the Parliamentary Committee on Development. The committee was basically concerned about ineffectiveness and inefficiency in delivery of various public services, especially in high hills and mountainous region of the country. It had also expressed concerns over presence of settlements in disaster-prone areas. Based on these observations, the NPC held discussions with various stakeholders and finally selected Bajura to launch the pilot project, because it is the least developed district in the country in terms of human development. A team led by NPC has already visited the district and conducted various studies, including geological study, and risk analysis. Now, we are waiting for the Cabinet's green signal to roll out the pilot project in Bajura. We believe the pilot project will be able to deliver better outcome if there is a single body to execute various works and look into progress being made. So, this calls for a need to establish a separate project office, which will coordinate with different government agencies to implement the project. Such an office can be created under the local body of the Ministry of Urban Development. So, I cannot exactly say how fast the pilot project can be implemented because we first need to get the Cabinet approval.

The report has identified the need to relocate settlements from five different village development committees (VDCs) of Bajura. Isn't that a challenging task because people generally don't like the idea of moving from places where they have lived for ages?

We know convincing people to leave the place with which they have emotional attachment is a difficult job. But people living in certain settlements will have to be relocated because they are living in risk-prone areas. The biggest VDC in Bajura, for instance, is Bichhya. But most of the settlements in this VDC are not suita-

Many settlements in high hills and mountainous region are small and scattered. This makes it difficult for the government to deliver basic public services, such as education, health, drinking water, roads and electricity, to each and every household. Also, the cost of delivering services in such areas is high. In this regard, the National Planning Commission has floated the proposal of creating integrated human settlements in high hills and mountainous region and has sought the government's permission to roll out a pilot project in Bajura district. **Rupal D Sharma of The Himalayan Times** talked to **Gopi Nath Mainali**, Chief of the Infrastructure Development Division at the NPC, on benefits of integrated settlements and problems that may crop up while implementing the project.

ble for living. We came to know about this after analysing soil composition, geological and topographical conditions, frequency of floods and landslides, access to marketplaces and productivity of agricultural land, among others. Initially, some of the residents of the VDC objected to the idea of relocation, but now they want the project to be implemented soon. So, it is all about convincing people by giving them facts. Now, we think we will be able to convince people of other districts, such as Dolpa, Mugu and Sindhupalchowk, where settlements are located in even more riskier places than in Bajura. However, we acknowledge it was easier to convince people of Bajura because it only consists of one constituency. This means we cannot rule out the possibility of relocation issue turning into a political hot potato in districts with more than one constituency, because politicians do not like change in the composition of their vote banks. We, therefore, will have to tread carefully in such districts and try to relocate people in the same constituency. Also, we should first try to win the confidence of people. And the final decision on project implementation will have to be taken at the political level to avoid controversies.

NPC chose Bajura to launch the pilot project because of its backwardness in human development. But wouldn't it have been wiser if you had chosen an earthquake-hit district? This would have provided an opportunity to build infrastructure damaged or destroyed by quake, while rolling out the pilot project, isn't it?

Yes, that would have been better. But we had chosen Bajura and almost finalised the report on integrated settlement by the time the devastating earthquakes hit the country. We know Bajura is not a quake-affected district. But if it were to be hit by earthquakes of a magnitude of the April or May ones, collateral damage is certain. This is because of the soil composition and gradient of land there. And the floods and landslides have already wiped away so many settlements there. So, Bajura is a disaster-prone district. Besides, integrated settlement projects are also being launched in 16 other districts located in high hills and mountainous region, which include quake-hit districts such as Rasuwa, Sindhupalchowk and Dolakha. Recently, we have also started holding discussions on launching such projects in all earthquake-hit districts, although this decision is yet to be finalised.

So, how will NPC coordinate with the National Authority for

Reconstruction (NAR) in this regard, as one of the mandates given to NAR is to formulate policies for development of areas damaged by earthquake?

I think the NAR can now take over this job and execute tasks based on policy framed by the NPC.

In Bajura, settlements are spread in 27 VDCs. How many settlements can be reduced with the implementation of integrated settlement project?

We have already done studies on that as well. For instance, Chhatara VDC will only have nine settlements; Atichaur will also have similar number of settlements. Similarly, Baddhu and Dogadi VDCs will only have three settlements. The technicians will now have to finalise the exact locations where settlements can be created.

And what will be the fund requirement for this purpose?

We'll definitely need a large amount of money. This is because we are identifying settlements based on various indicators like topography, geological condition, access to infrastructure, drinking water facilities, access to marketplaces, income generating opportunities, access to basic public services, land-use possibilities, disaster-related risks, availability of physical infrastructure and effects of climate change. However, what should also be noted is that different government ministries are already spending quite a lot of financial resources in districts like Bajura to cater various public services. Currently, almost all ministries are operating projects in districts like Bajura, but they are operating the projects on their own. What we are trying to do now is channelise all these funds from one body so that the money can be utilised more effectively and efficiently.

But the funds that the government is currently spending on public service delivery have not yielded encouraging results, isn't it?

This is the reason why we are launching the integrated human settlement project. Over the years, the government has been allocating quite a big chunk of budget for districts located in high hills and mountainous region. But effectiveness of such spending has always raised questions. Dolpa, for instance, is much larger than Mahakali zone. However, population of this district stands at around 36,700. Besides, many of these people do not reside in one place throughout the year, as they are mobile. Yet, the government

feels obliged to expand road network or build irrigation projects in two or three villages located on a hilltop. And separate offices are established for this purpose, which raises service delivery cost. This way the government ends up spending billions of rupees just to cater basic services to sparsely populated areas. If this continues, more financial resources will have to be exhausted in building roads and electricity lines in areas where only five or 10 households reside. This is why we want to create integrated settlements. This, however, does not mean we will coerce families living in far-flung areas to move to integrated settlements because the constitution upholds people's right to live wherever they desire. So, what we will do is deliver all basic public services and build necessary infrastructure in integrated settlements, which, we believe, will encourage people to move to these planned residential areas.

Do you think creation of federal states in future will affect your plans in anyway?

We are carving out federal states to deliver better services to the public. So, what people want is access to unrestricted public services. On the other hand, any form of government, whether central or federal, will focus on delivering quality service and fulfilling other needs of people at the lowest possible cost. So, actors who make decisions, other decision-making processes and agencies that implement the projects may change in a federal structure. But the ultimate goal of fulfilling needs and desires of people will remain the same. So, I don't think much will change even after federal states are carved.

Lastly, do you want to add anything?

We are running late in implementation of the project, as some of the deadlines have to met by mid-October. The project also needs to be implemented as soon as possible because many settlements are located in disaster-prone areas. So, high priority should be given to this project, as it will create safer settlements, reduce government's service delivery cost and make service delivery mechanism efficient. Also, what needs to be understood is that managed settlements can ensure better public services. And a better public service delivery system only can address discontents and dissatisfaction of people.

Chinese computer hack attacks slow ahead of Obama summit: Experts

Reuters
Washington, September 20

Major intrusions by Chinese hackers of US companies' computer systems appear to have slowed in recent months, private-sector experts say, ahead of a meeting between China's president and President Barack Obama with cybersecurity on the agenda.

Three senior executives at private-sector firms in the field told Reuters they had noticed a downturn in hacking activity. "The pace of new breaches feels like it's tempering," said Kevin Mandia, founder of Mandiant, a prominent company that investigates sophisticated corporate breaches.

A point of friction in US-China relations, cybersecurity will be a major focus of talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping this week in Washington, DC, Obama said earlier this week.

In the same remarks, Obama called for a global framework to prevent the internet from being 'weaponised' as a tool of national aggression, while also holding out the prospect of a forceful US response to China over recent hacking attacks.

Mandia has probed major corporate breaches, including those at Sony Pictures Entertainment, Target and health-care insurers. Experts have connected some of these to a breach of classified background investigations at the US Office of Personnel Management, which was traced to China.

Government-supported hackers in China may have backed off recently as Chinese and US officials began negotiating in earnest over cybersecurity ahead of the Obama-Xi summit. "In my gut, I feel like the Chinese and the US over the next couple of years are going to figure this out," said Mandia, now an executive at Mandiant's parent, FireEye Inc.

The FBI declined to comment on Friday. The Obama administration has been weighing bringing economic sanctions against Chinese companies that have benefited from intellectual property theft. But no sanctions have been brought and US companies disagree on the wisdom of such retaliation.

US Assistant Attorney General John Carlin, who leads the Justice Department's National Security Division, has

scheduled a press availability on cybersecurity for Wednesday in Pittsburgh.

That is the same day that President Xi is scheduled to attend an internet industry forum in Seattle hosted by Microsoft Corp. Xi will depart the next day for Washington, DC.

On Saturday, a Justice Department spokesman said Carlin will make routine remarks and answer questions. The spokesman said he expected US cyber espionage charges brought in May 2014 against five Chinese army officers would come up. The indictment alleged the officers conspired from 2006 to 2014 to hack into US entities' computers and steal information.

In July, the FBI said economic espionage cases it had handled in the preceding 12 months were up 53 per cent from a year earlier, with China the biggest offender. Statistically, that period could have included a falloff toward the end.

While Mandia said his perception of a slowdown was unscientific and based on 'how often my phone has been ringing', others voiced similar views.

Stuart McClure, chief executive of Cy-lance Inc, a smaller cybersecurity firm, said he too had noticed a drop-off in presumed Chinese attacks going back about six months. 'He has more volume' and so has a broader perspective, McClure said of Mandia. "But we have not seen the samples of attacks like we had been."

Mandia and McClure spoke on Thursday on the sidelines of the Billington CyberSecurity Summit in Washington, DC.

Tom Kellermann, chief cybersecurity officer at large security vendor Trend Micro Inc, said in an interview in New York he also had seen fewer new Chinese hacks recently, though he said one campaign that compromised US defence contractors years ago might be adding new government targets.

"There's been a consolidation in activity coming out of China," Kellermann said. "It's down a notch."

A spokeswoman for security investigations firm CrowdStrike said in an email that it had not seen a significant change.

The Billington conference featured White House Cybersecurity Policy Coordinator Michael Daniel. After speaking on a panel, Daniel suggested to reporters that Chinese officials are listening hard to US complaints on economic spying.

TO APPRECIATE WHAT WE HAVE TODAY,
WE MUST REALIZE WHERE WE WERE, YESTERDAY.

PEER INTO THE PAST AND YOU WILL LEARN TO SEE.

SEE BEYOND THAT INFERNO OF RAGE, MAYHEM AND DISUNITY,
BEYOND THOSE SCARRED HORIZONS OF POVERTY, BLOODSHED AND BATTLE,
BEYOND THE PYRRHIC VICTORIES.

FAR BEYOND EVERY SINGLE DIFFERENCE THAT HAS SPLIT AND DIVIDED US
LIES A SINGULAR SOUL IN SILENCE.

THINK CONSTRUCTIVE

INTEGRITY IS OUR IDENTITY
FOR TRUTH IS AT THE HEART OF WHO WE ARE.

NEPALI IS MUCH MORE THAN AN ADJECTIVE, QUALIFIER OR LABEL.

IT IS A SPIRIT. LIKE NO OTHER.

OUR MOTHERLAND HAS COME A LONG WAY. AND THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING.
THE FUTURE LIES IN THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF THOSE WHO TRULY BELIEVE IN IT.

NOW, MORE THAN EVER, WE DO.

Panchakanya
GROUP

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