Message by Right Honorable Prime Minister
Mr. KP Sharma Oli’s on the Occasion of the May Day 2020

1 May 2020

My hearty greetings to all dear workers, sisters and brothers in Nepal and abroad!

Workers throughout the world have been celebrating the 1st of May as the international workers day for the last hundred and thirty years. The day was first observed to mark the day on which trade union movement started with the aim of ending oppression of workers at the hands of the employers. This particular day is remembered as the day on which the demand of the workers for their right of maintaining proper balance between work, recreation and rest was first accepted. Nepali trade union movement has been observing the May Day to mark all struggles towards their quest for a dignified, prosperous and creative life of the workers.

In the recent times, we have been marking the occasion as a day of celebration of ‘unity and achievements’ of Nepali workers. Every year, we also take this day as an occasion to reflect and deliberate on our achievements and to further commit ourselves for realizing the unfinished agenda in the world of work.

But we are marking this year’s Labour Day amidst a totally different circumstance. Our world of work is in a state of lock-down due to the ongoing global pandemic of Corona Virus. As I have mentioned on earlier occasions, the link of our production system in our country has broken today. Our creative hands are under lockdown at this moment. The means of production which are awaiting our labour are also motionless in the lockdown.

However, the current state of lockdown is not limited to our country only, this has now become a worldwide phenomenon and it is compelling. But we have no alternative than accepting it. The adverse impacts of the pandemic in the areas of construction, employment and production has created a unique situation in which all classes of society are compelled to reflect on the relationship between labour and production in the same way the working-class people have been viewing this relationship for long.

Labour is a fundamental thing and the life is the supreme thing. Today’s stark reality has once again made it clear that without labour, capital and technology are meaningless.

I am disheartened at the daily hardship faced by all workers who have lost their income due to the closures of factories and businesses. Hundreds of Nepali workers are now working in distant lands. Due to the decade long violent conflict, they were first driven away from their livelihoods in the villages into the
cities and towns; and when the cities and towns couldn’t provide them employment, they embarked on the pursuit of livelihoods in distant foreign lands.

More than this, there are other compelling circumstances and trends. And, now they are trapped in a situation in which they are neither at ease at their work in the country they live now, nor can they return to their homeland immediately. I am aware of this and sensitive to the painful situation that has resulted from this difficult predicament of Nepali workers. At this difficult hour, I would like to express my sincere solidarity with all Nepali workers, sisters and brothers, currently in Nepal and abroad.

Dear brothers and sisters,

For the last two years, our economy was on a steady momentum of development. There was high level of understanding between entrepreneurs and the workers, coordinated by the Government. It was due to that harmonious state of relations between the employers and employees, it was possible to raise the minimum salary of workers with historic increment of thirty-nine per cent.

In the backdrop of almost regular industrial strife in the immediate past, ‘strikes and closures’ were almost like nightmare, forgotten long ago in the Nepali world of work. Our economic growth rate was in the trajectory of reaching toward the target of double digit. The Government, in its second year, had increased the budget allocation in labour sector by almost two-fold. Various programs were in operation under the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, mainly focused on four major goals: training of skilled workforce, employment generation, social security, and safe and accessible foreign employment.

In the past two years, 2.2 million work-days worth of employment opportunities were created under the Prime Minister Employment Program. For the first time, payment of worker’s wages through banking channel was made mandatory. And, a contribution-based social security scheme was introduced in Nepal for the first time with the objective of making workers life secure while in employment and after their retirement.

The Government guaranteed that every working age individual would get at least one hundred days of employment in a year. The Government signed labour agreements with several labour destination countries, and provisions were made, by employing modern information technology, to provide simplified and easily accessible labour-related services. Skill development and entrepreneurship promotion programs were launched targeting unemployment. Loans, up to seven hundred thousand rupees, at 5 per cent interest subsidy per year were made available for youths with higher education.

But today, on the eve of this May Day, I have to sadly mention that we all are involved in the war against Corona Virus pandemic. For the moment, all our efforts
are directed towards facing the problems caused by the pandemic. At this moment, the Government is focusing on containing the virus, tracing, testing, and treating the infected. In order to leave no stone unturned in our efforts, we have made provisions of insurance worth Rupees 25,00,000 to cover the lives of all those in frontline involved in the war against this pandemic.

Personal protective equipment have been made available for them and their allowance has been further increased by hundred per cent. The Government has also made necessary provisions to maintain the salary of the lockdown period and provide additional 1500 Rupees allowance to Women Community Health Volunteers.

In order to ensure that the income of the workers associated under the Social Security Fund, the Government has directly deposited in the Fund the amount equivalent to the contribution of the workers. Double taxation on the social security contribution has been waived.

Subsidized electric induction ovens are made available along with electricity tariff incentives. In order to ensure daily necessity, relief provisions are made available for those working on daily-wage basis under the coordination of local, province and federal level administrations.

**Dear working brothers and sisters,**

It is my conviction that the working class people have the strength and courage to face hardships; at the same time, they do not lose sight of their dream for a better life. The working class is that class of people that remains in the vanguard of confronting the problems in society and in providing solace to the ordinary people in distress. They are the agent of change and transformation.

The frontline warriors such as the doctors, health workers, security personnel, and sanitary workers are testimony to this fact. Due to their tireless works, our country has achieved remarkable success in the ongoing fight against Corona Virus in comparison to similar efforts in the rest of the world. Till date, we have been able to maintain an encouraging record by containing the virus from spreading into community level, and avoiding deaths. I highly appreciate all those who are thus dedicated to protecting our lives at the risk of their own.

I fully understand that this year we should have reviewed the minimum wage for our workers, keeping in view the periodic review. But you all know that the circumstance is not favourable for us.

Statistics indicate that this year we might have to limit ourselves within 3% or less economic growth, in contrast to our ambitious target of achieving 8.5 per cent growth. I have mentioned on earlier occasion that we have already lost almost about 4 per cent of our total GDP due to the ongoing pandemic.
In comparative terms, it is estimated that the current economic situation will evolve into a scenario which might be similar or even worse to the great depression of the last century. During the great depression of the 1930s, in some industrialized countries more than 23 to 33 per cent of the working-age population was rendered unemployed.

Already, in the first four months of this pandemic, more workers have become unemployed than those during the whole decade of that great depression. In the first four months following the onset of the pandemic, gross domestic production in those industrialized countries have shrunk by almost three-fold, compared to the total loss of their GDP for the whole of that depression decade.

I would like to mention here our traditional saying, that it is the duty of the head of the family to feed his fellow members in such a difficult time. The head will provide for the survival of the family devising means and ways, though not at the same comfort level and in the way as in normal times.

Your government, led by this Prime Minister, will resort to all available resources and means to secure your sustenance.

You may ask, “But how?”

I have to say this. Henceforth, all our efforts will be directed towards one single goal: ‘Healthy citizens, skilled citizens; dignified work, and social security’. In the same manner we declared the decade after the earthquake as the decade of reconstruction, our first priority will now be to secure our society from Corona Virus. As I have mentioned in my earlier addresses, that the pandemic has exposed our poor state of affairs in the health sector. This pandemic has inspired us to invest more in our public health infrastructures in the same manner the great depression of the 20th century had inspired the industrialized countries to add welfare dimension into their economies which ultimately, and fundamentally transformed the very nature of capitalism itself. The Government will now increase investment in the public health infrastructure alongside the universal health insurance as guaranteed by our Constitution, as well as increase investment in the education sector to produce skilled citizens. Our direction will now be: ‘Health for today, education for tomorrow’.

All our efforts will now be directed towards uniting the country in the fight against the pandemic and ensuring employment and social security for working people. First of all, we will restore the links in the disrupted production system.

We all know that relief measures are only temporary means. Work for all will be our first goal. Government will bring all working people within the ambit of social security system. Those already in work will be ensured the minimum pay. The government will create a situation in which nobody will have to lose their income or job.
The Government will mobilize labour-intensive technologies at all levels in development – federal, province and local. A new model of development will be embraced in which a proper balance will be ensured between labour and technology, and the Government will pay for people's participation. Those returning from foreign employment will be provided with easy loans and appropriate technologies enabling them to create self-employment, based on the skills and experiences they have gained during their work abroad. Those who are in the country and those who have not been able to go for overseas employment will be brought under the fold of the 'Prime Minister Employment Scheme'. All employment opportunities created by Ministries, agencies and public enterprises will be secured for the Nepali citizens.

In this context, with a view to fulfilling the need for skilled labour, Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) and all labour and skill development related agencies will be run in a unified manner. In order to bridge the skills gap at local level, short-term mobile training camps will be run on need basis.

Maximum efforts will be made to take full benefit of the dividends availed by our young population. Such a young population, which will be a productive population. Such a productive workforce, which will be equipped with skills and technology with capital. Such a youth force, which will be innovative and equipped with vocational knowledge and skills.

Production and employment opportunities will be enhanced by modernization and commercialization of agriculture sector. For those who do not own land and want to cultivate land, 'land bank' will be implemented and they will be provided with necessary land through such a land bank. The process of providing concessional and easily accessible loans from banks and ensuring requisite skills will be advanced in a coordinated way.

Our sisters and brothers injured during the past political movements and conflicts are still awaiting proper treatment. The repeated messages of the Government’s offer and efforts for their treatment might not have reached them. I call upon you all, please come forward, and contact the administration. Those who have sacrificed for the greater cause of the nation should no longer live with bullets still in their wounds; the Government will take care of your treatment.

Dear sisters and brothers,

The transformation of Nepali society and today’s unprecedented stability and development in the recent history did not come automatically. Creation of this environment has been made possible by a long struggle of countless sacrifices that was guided by the right ideology towards aright direction and pursued with conscious efforts over the period. A few Nepali media outlets and social media network appear to have given space to the forces that seem to be bent on disseminating news and views that are against order, stability, and development of the country, and forcing this nation again into the vicious cycle of instability.
On the one hand, all Nepali people and the entire world are fighting against the pandemic of Corona Virus, on the other, it is sad that there are efforts towards creating instability taking undue advantage of this difficult situation.

Any efforts guided by petty interest to destabilize this nation and to unravel this delicate situation in the country at this critical juncture will not be acceptable at all to the Government, the dedicated cadres of the Nepal Communist Party, and to the Nepali people in general. I would like to assure you all that such an ulterior effort will not be allowed to succeed.

Nepal’s political movement has always provided ideological leadership to the trade union movement. At the same time, the trade union movement of the country has many lessons for the political movement too – do not waver in difficult moments, save the means of sustenance in trying times, and promote social dialogue to share the benefits in a just way during the favourable period of relative peace and stability, and most importantly, progressively move ahead by maintaining unity among diversity.

Trade union has taught us a valuable lesson - “The process of maintaining unity and making Union is like adding rungs on a ladder. Only after strengthening the lower rungs we can confidently climb up the ladder further. Therefore, let’s clime up while watching where our steps are’.

Therefore, I want to say: during this difficult hour we should move ahead united, like a Union. While looking up to the sky of our aspirations, we should also look to our people, our foundation, just the way the Union always does.

If we have weaknesses, we should correct them. But, not in an unruly way: we should remain disciplined. We should consider time factor and move along time. We should not betray ourselves – we should remain sincere; the way Union teaches us.

In this context, I would like to acknowledge the common platform of all recognized Nepali trade unions – The Joint Trade Union Coordination Centre - JTUCC, Nepal. I would like to extend my best wishes on this May Day to all trade unions, and all the workers associated with the unions under the umbrella of JTUCC, and the entire working people.

Thank you!