

Tauqueer Ali Sabri (TAS): Namaste from Kathmandu. Today we will be talking about changing world order and prospects of left in Nepal. We have with us Dr. Khagendra Prasai. Dr. Prasai is Associate Professor of Political Philosophy at National Open University and currently serves as Dean of its Faculty of Social Science and Education. He has produced many books on topics like Marxism, class, caste, democracy within a political party and global politics. He also leads Foundation for Critical Discourse, a Kathmandu based think tank which works to promote Marxist socialist and progressive idea in Nepal. Welcome, Dr. Prasai.

As global power is shifting toward a multipolar world, the world is grappling with many crises, wealth, inequality or widening, food prices are surging. Many wars are continuing 21st century — war in Gaza, Ukraine-Russia war and changes in South Asian geopolitics. We will discuss many topics today.

Dr. Khagendra, can you please interpret the current shift in global order, especially in the decline of unipolarity and the rise of multipolarity?

Khagendra Prasai (KP): Thank you for having me on this program and I would also appreciate your choice of the most important topic of our time which is shift from unipolarity to multipolarity. To begin with, let me first clarify what theoretical perspective I choose to approach this kind of question. Usually, I approach this kind of questions and other questions for that matter from historical materialist point of view, which means by understanding the dynamics of capital and how capitalism is unfolding and developing.

On your questions of interpretation of shift from unipolarity to multipolarity, yes, the world is expeditiously and visibly moving from unipolarity to multipolarity. When I approach this question from Marxist point of view or historical materialist point of view, I try to understand this in the context of how capital itself is behaving and how capitalism is unfolding as I have already mentioned earlier. The important thing is that if you look at the current global system of capitalism, there is a massive shift of accumulation of capital from northern world to the southern world. Sometimes you can call it south and global south and global north. So now global south is much richer than it was 30 years ago and global north is much poorer than it was 30 or 40 years ago. So there is a massive shift of wealth from global north to global south and there are incontestable evidence to make a case for this kind of thing. And when

capital itself is being increasingly decentralized in the sense that it is being reasonably redistributed, across, many nations and geographical territories look. Now China is much richer than it was 40 years ago, India much richer than it was 40 years ago, Brazil is another country, Indonesia, any can pick up any country, they were colonized and looted and exploited for centuries and centuries in 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th century. Now these countries are leading in economy, their economies are much better than they were 30, 40 years ago. So this actually proves that there is a massive distribution of capital across geographical territories and the west which used to exercise unchallengeable power in early 90s and early 2010, then now they are no longer as powerful as they used to be economically, very, very clearly. Even politically nowadays there are many countries which have started challenging western domination, you can choose African countries, you can look at like South Asian countries, you can look at any country in the world, Latin American country. So, they are openly challenging the domination and one-sided hegemony of western capitalist system. So there is a very visible shift from unipolarity which was the characteristic feature of the world in early 90s. So now to a multipolarity which means the capital is being redistributed, capital is no longer being concentrated in some specific small pockets of territory. So there is a very, very clear case of shift from unipolarity to multipolarity. But some people argue that, oh yes, economically we are being multipolar but military not. So they still believe that western capitalist alliance, NATO and the United States, are far more powerful than the entire world combined like militarily. But that is no longer the case. I give you two or three arguments in that case. So the first thing is the global south, countries of the global regional are far more powerful because militarily they used to be 20 years old. And then the second point is if your economy is declining, you cannot sustain a powerful military system within your country. So if you need a very strong economy to sustain a military power, so if the western economy is declining, if you believe that western economy is declining, then they will no longer be able to sustain a strong military.

And then there are visible cases that NATO and the United States have been defeated very miserably in many, many countries in the world.

So even military point, from military point of view, the west is not as powerful as it used to be during 1990s. Like the rise of Russia as a military power, rise of China as a military power, rise of even India as a military power, and there are other countries.

So the military equations, so to speak, has massively changed. So it is not the world which used to be during 1990s. So the world has separated from unipolarity to multipolarity. Yes, of course, the United States is still very powerful, but if you compare that, like the power of the United States versus the power of China and India and Russia during 1990, the equations have massively changed.

TAS: Yes, thank you. Just one question comes to my mind while you were discussing multipolarity. The Trump tariff is also probably a response to the multipolar world. He is trying to position himself differently.

KP: I mean, that actually is the manifestation or very good indications of the crisis which is unfolding within the United States. So the United States cannot revive its economy by any sensible way. So the way they can try, of course, there is a way they can do, but the capitalists do not want to do that way. So the way is like focus on your national economy and withdraw from all military bases throughout the world. And that money can be used to revive your economy domestically, but they are not going to do that because there is a huge lobby which actually benefits from these empire-like things like military places throughout the world. But they are not going to do that. What they are going to do is like increase the military spending and do this kind of stuff. That's why they want to revive their economy. And the only way they think they can do it is by increasing tariffs and this kind of thing. But I don't know that will work. So the imposing high tariff on other countries actually is a very, very good example or proof of the fact that the crisis is seriously unfolding, developing or heightening in the United States. So they want to fix that crisis by this means. But I'm pretty sure they cannot they cannot resolve the crisis this way.

TAS: OK, thank you.

It's interesting to understand how Trump is trying to fix their own crisis at the cost of the global community. So my other question is how will shift of power from unipolar to multipolar is going to impact Nepal. Nepal has very unique position historically. Nepal was untouched by the colonial power. Nepal has been sovereign state even during the monarchy. Monarchy has different challenges, but that Nepal was always a sovereign state.

But now how do you see this multipolar order will affect or what implication it will have for Nepal?

KP: The first point I would like to make is the multipolarity provides offers a huge opportunity for a country like Nepal.

So though Nepal had never been a formal colony, but hegemony has been exercised by a country like India for quite a long time during British India and during independent India. So but the important thing, what is happening, the new thing that is coming is that so the multipolarity is offering a huge amount of opportunity. For example, now, if there are nations who are roughly equally powerful, imagine a very utopian situation or at least at least one nation cannot dominate any other nation, though it is slightly more powerful. If that is the case, then Nepal will have a better opportunity to negotiate with these nations. So Nepal no longer has to be dominated by one economy by being entirely or more or less largely dependent on one economy. That will actually disappear. The multipolarity will bring us the opportunity that no one nation will be able to dictate or dominate or exploit us. We will have an opportunity to negotiate with other nations. So you need to understand this in the context of the multipolarity in the sense that multipolarity is distributing capital, accretion nations and territory. When capital is less concentrated, if capital is more decentralized or distributed, then it loses its power of hegemony and dictatorships. One capital competing with other capital, that will provide Nepal a better opportunity.

But the other important point we should not ignore is, so when the shift from unipolarity and multipolarity is happening, the hegemonic Western nations, if try to restore or maintain their hegemonic power, which is actually declining rapidly by use of force or by some physical conflict, then the other disastrous situation might happen because Nepal can be a battleground of two warring nations or competing nations or fighting nations. Sometimes that happens and the United States has a very open policy of encircling China by using countries like India and Japan and South Korea and even Philippines. And they have a very explicit well worked out plan of including Nepal as their partner. So if that is the case, then there will be a serious contradictions between China and then the United States are a Western power and which will not be a very good thing for Nepal.

TAS: Nepal is a very strategic place which means many countries want to make their presence stronger like China is one hand pushing the Belt and Road Initiative, other hand there is US-led Indo-Pacific strategy.

So how you understand Nepal government, Nepali intelligentsia is going to look these —China's Belt Road and US Indo-Pacific strategy.

KP: Yeah, yeah, I already mentioned very briefly that there is a possibility, there's some potentials of conflict between China and the United States. So the Indo-Pacific is basically, the United States is openly pushing its Indo-Pacific strategy with the purpose of encircling China and not leading China to emerge as a global leader or a regional. And that's a very open policy of the United States and they have this Indo-Pacific strategy. And if Indo-Pacific strategy is successfully implemented, it is almost certain that China will respond accordingly, in which case there is a possibility of some kind, some war between China and the United States, maybe some limited all out war or what kind of war it could be anything. So in that case, the United States has a very clear strategy of including Nepal as its partner in this mission of encircling China, which China will not allow to happen. So you can just very understand nothing. In that case, Nepal will suffer very massively, as I already mentioned, Nepal can be a battleground.

But on the other hand, like, so this competition also offers some opportunities. So China has a very big amount of money on the BRI. It's not just about money. So the BRI is, so to speak, the largest or the greatest global project in human history.

It's not just about economy. There are other dimensions and also, but let's focus on economy for this moment.

And they are offering a huge amount of money to Nepal and to many other countries as well, which everybody knows. So this will be a very good opportunity for Nepal. And the good part about BRI is that there is no extreme attached to it. Like if you receive funding from some grants from the United States, there are a lot of strings attached with it, in which maybe sometime it would be very difficult for a nation to actually implement those strings, actually. So the good part of China is there are no strings attached with it, and it will allow you autonomy to choose your project, to choose how you want to proceed with your project. So the BRI is offering opportunity to Nepal, as it has offered opportunity, massive opportunities to many other Africans and Latin American countries and many, many countries in the world. So BRI will be a very good opportunity for Nepal. There's no doubt about that. But the Indo-Pacific strategy and any other grants or development projects associated with Indo-Pacific

can create a situation in Nepal, which will finally bring China and the United States into a physical conflict.

TAS: Yes. So where is Nepal placing itself between two important neighbours — India and China — in this changing political, in economic world?

KP: Oh, I mean, just your question has to do with that. Are you suggesting that in the context of conflict between China and India or in the context of general relationship between China and India?

TAS: Largely in the global order. And also, why and in what way is Nepal going to counter them.

KP: The way things are unfolding, like recently in five, ten years, it is very difficult to predict what kinds of relationship China and India will have in the future. We'll be living in an enemy with each other. So they will be very close friends with each other. But the very deeper economic ties with each other, I think, will not allow them to be an enemy with each other, I guess. So I think both parties like China and India will act wisely on that. And that will be very, very enormously beneficial for Asia as a whole and also the world. So these are two emerging economies, perhaps in few years. China and India will be the first or second economy in the world, which are the predictions over there. So if China and India happen to be enemies or a serious competition with each other, then that will not be good for Nepal. So and then Nepal will be in a very difficult situation. What to do and which side, which country to side with? Like it will be very difficult for us to choose that course. So let us hope that some in China and India will become very cooperative friends with each other. And then I think if both these countries want to progress, then that is the best option for them.

So I think the way things are unfolding, like for example, India sometimes showing that it wants to have a very nice relationship with China. And on the other hand, it's choosing to be a part of like Western alliance, sometimes even military alliance.

Things are complicated and nobody can say anything for sure. Like nobody can predict with 100 percent certainty, 100 percent guarantee. So let's see how things unfold and then we can make a very definitive judgment about that. So but everybody knows it is it is it'll be good for South Asia. It will be good for Asia as a whole. It will

be good for the world. These two emerging economic powers have a very cooperative and friendly relationship with each other. So avoid any kind of physical conflict.

TAS: Yes, thank you. So my next question, closer to India and Nepal.

I want to understand how Nepal will respond to India-China relationship. You have spoken about the importance of India and Nepal relations. For quite of some time, it was not very smooth due to the many factors. And how do you see in the future this relationship between India and Nepal is going to unfold because historically India and Nepal have very close tie.

Not only the economically, not the social relationship between India and Nepal, lot of business, lot of matrimonial relation. It is a very emotional relation with India and Nepal, but time to time there is some spark which make people from both sides very nervous.

KP: Yeah, I mean, that's a very important question. So the way things are unfolding, the bigger possibility is that Nepal, India relation will qualitatively transform itself. The reason I'm saying this is, for example, for quite a long time, India has become one, sole hegemonic power, vis-à-vis Nepal. We have a very limited, extremely limited economic transactions and other cultural and academic transactions and other kinds of transactions with China and with other countries as well. But almost like we had this overwhelmingly bigger portions of our transactions within the cultural labour transactions, labour exchange and this kind of thing. But now things are changing. The world is opening up and Nepal is increasingly connecting itself with other nations in the world. Even for sending its labour power, like India used to be the kind of the sole labour absorber for Nepal. So this is no longer the case. So we were so much economically dependent on India that we had very limited relationship with other countries in the world. But the things are changing and this multipolarity is bringing the opportunity that now you can have relationship with other nations and you can have a better bargaining or negotiating power with other nations. So India will not be a decisive factor anymore. Like will not be one force which will dictate everything in Nepal. That used to be the case for some time. So no longer the case. So good for us. And then hope Indian establishment and India as a whole will understand the situation. Maybe if things continue to unfold the way they are unfolding nowadays. So we will have a more economic transaction with China, with

Japan, with other countries. And then the overwhelming portions of our foreign transaction, foreign threats with India will decrease. And along with that, Indian hegemonic power will also decrease. That's how I try to understand in terms of capital dynamics. I think you get the dynamics of capital. So in that situation, it is possible that Nepal and India will have more friendly relationship than with like big brother, small brother relationship.

TAS: How do you look the South Asia and the left politics at the time when left is shrinking or in India, even though on the thinking and on the movement, left are still alive, but on the democratic politics, things are not very good.

Largely, I just wanted to understand, how South Asia and left politics is going to unfold in coming years.

KP: I start, I like to approach your questions by invoking the idea that for any kind of politics, there has to be a corresponding material conditions, which is basically economic condition. The left politics can grow or will have opportunity to grow when there is appropriate, a suitable material condition, which means certain kind of economic system and then certain kind of class or classes or a group of people or individuals who actually want to let politics and if you do not have that conditions. So, for example, you cannot have a radical left or radical, not in the sense of like insurgency type radical, but policy wise radical. So, you cannot have a radical left politics, opportunity for radical left politics when your farmers are middle class, most of them are middle class and when there is no stronger industrial class, you cannot have that. So Indian intellectuals need to understand this, the left politics can grow in India only when these conditions are met. Plus, in Nepal, yes of course, there was a very good opportunity for left politics during 90s and even a little bit after that. But the left could not implement their policies and the simple reason was that neoliberal capitalism was so powerful. The left could not resist it; they were unable to resist it. So, it was so powerful because it was the ease of capitalism and if it is the ease of capitalism, then what happens is so the capital will cross or will this way, everything that comes in its way.

If they see that, okay, these left political parties or peoples are coming in our way, then we need to cross them by hook or by crook, perhaps by bribing peacefully, by bribing them or intimidating them or by crossing them in a different way which the

United States has done in many countries by overthrowing democratically elected government, as you know.

And then the important, the other important thing is, in order for the left politics to grow, you need to understand whether these conditions are there or not. So the good part about the multipolar world now is that. So as I told you earlier, why, why many left political forces or parties in many parts of the world could not perform as a left parties during 90s and little bit after that, the reason was the, the capitalism was so powerful. So now what happens is when there is a multipolarity and the capital is deconcentrated or capital is distributed, the capital will lose its overarching power because it is, it is less concentrated. But when, when capital loses its overarching power or dictatorship, what happens is small countries like, even, even like India, or Pakistan, or Sri Lanka will have better autonomy. Once a nation has better autonomy in degree, then its left politics will have a better autonomy. It's a corresponding thing. A nation is autonomous means its political forces are autonomous, relatively. So, the multipolarity is offering an opportunity, will offer an opportunity for the left politics in that sense. By offering more autonomy for a nation and by offering more autonomy for a nation, the multipolarity will offer a more autonomy for left politics. Now, they don't have to be dictated by world bank and IMF, which used to be the case during 90s. Once the dictatorship of IMF and world bank is gone, the left can have more autonomy.

So in that sense, multipolarity will bring opportunity for the left for this. Any, any progressive politics for that matter? Generally, any pro socialist politics for that matter.

TAS: How is the left in Nepal responding to these big changes, whether it can still be a strong political force in a time of division, political fatigue and growing authoritarianism in the country?

KP: Yeah, yes. Growing authoritarianism regionally or globally perhaps. That's a very important question. When there is a crisis in the capitalist system, generally, and the crisis in the neoliberal system, which you have now, it actually gives you two options. The first option is the rise of fascism or a fascist like political forces, or some other dictator dictatorship type of political forces. And the other is opportunity for socialism.

And so, and you as you see that there are enough ample evidences of growing authoritarianism sort of far right, fascist prototype, fascist or a fascist type political movement in many parts of the world, including India.

And then I think it will be very difficult for Nepal to actually, or Nepalese left politics to start its own course in this in this context, nobody can say anything with certainty.

But the thing is, if a fascist successfully goes to power, imagine hypothetically, then nobody can say what will happen to Nepal, what kind of politics will, so how politics will unfold in Nepal is uncertain to say. So and then yes, of course, but simultaneously, as you see, together with the rise of some kind of far, far right populist or fascist forces, there is also some indications of the rise of socialist or progressive socialist forces in look at Germany. I mean, these two forces are rising simultaneously. Though one forces is rising much faster than the other one. Look at the United States that is now a movement for socialism or a progressive or a charged political force. But there is simultaneously a movement for of a fascist type authoritarian force as we look at France. So that is happening in many parts of the world. And Nepal cannot be exception to that universal rule. But nobody can say for sure with certainty that this will happen and this will not happen.

Let us wait and see what happens. But the historical task of the Nepal is political left at this moment or any political left at this moment to prepare itself that, OK, this is this might potentially happen. And then the first task is to understand this. OK, this is happening. And how do you prepare yourself to respond to this unfolding political scenario or events? And then if the left can do that, then perhaps they can prevent the rise of authoritarianism. Knowledge is very powerful. You can you can you can prevent the rise of authoritarianism by understanding only by understanding how authoritarianism is rising in a particular moment of time. So that's very important. But the left is not doing that. The tragic part is the left intellectual forces of the left political parties actually, maybe they had no idea of what is happening or maybe they are not very interested in this kind of discourse. They are unable to unable to respond to this kind of unfolding. So, but the important thing is we need to prepare ourselves intellectually and politically and in other fronts as well to respond to this unfolding material condition which can create opportunity for fascist, right wing type of forces.

TAS: Thank you, Kargendra. It's very important point. Left and all political forces will have or should have to understand the trends of the far right. And you very rightly said a fascinating thing that to act, you must first understand it. So left and all progressive society have to understand what is happening in Nepal and globally towards the far right before they act.