

**(Photo of Author)  
Sunil Kumar Pokhrel**

## **“I represent entire telecom employees in the board of directors of Nepal Telecom”**

Sunil Kumar Pokhrel is currently working as Executive Engineer in Nepal Telecom. He is not only an established personality in the professional movement of Nepal which started with the restoration of democracy but also is Founder President and Advisor of Inter-corporation Employees Association (INCEA). Considering his active role in securing and strengthening of institutional and professional rights, he has been appointed as Director in the board of directors of Nepal Telecom from official trade union Telecommunications Employees Association of Nepal (TEAN) to represent telecommunication employees. His appointment in the board of directors of Nepal Telecom can be taken as a very positive step as the relationship between most of the trade unions of corporations and management remains complicated. Here are the excerpts of the conversation between Pokhrel and Peshagat Aawaj on professional and other various related issues:

**INCEA would like you to congratulate for you appointment in the high policy making level in the Nepal Telecom. How do you feel your appointment? What role will you play as the director?**

Thank you! I feel that this appointment is both responsibility and challenge for me. I am aware that my roles as the director in the company will not dent dignity in and responsibility of all trade unions. My major role will be developing a consensus between trade union and the company's management for policy making in Nepal Telecom and moving ahead by creating an environment conducive for professional rights.

**In past, His Majesty's Government used to appoint director directly, but this time you have been appointed according to the demand of the official trade union on behalf of TEAN. Can it be taken as His Majesty's Government positively changing policy towards trade unions? Can it be considered a result of struggle or pressure from a trade union? Some people are labeling it is interference of trade unions in the policy level. How do you view this blame and how do you define your appointment?**

Trade union activities have move ahead openly in Nepal after the restoration of democracy. Trade Unions representing professionals are on a mission from initial days in moral and physical push for their participation in the policy level. There are clear examples in front of us regarding this push as several protests have already been organized. My appointment in Nepal Telecom's board of directors is the result of the long struggle and pressure. I have taken this as an achievement for all trade unions.

Workers and professionals have the responsibility to implement policy-level decision in any organization. Actually, workers and professionals are experts in knowing problems in implementation level, ways to implement policies easily and alternatives. How can it be called

intervention when that group is represented by trade unions in the policy making level? A thinking that trade unions and management of organizations are two opposite poles that never come together is deep rooted in Nepal. I think the people with same thought take representation of trade union at policy making level as intervention. What I say is the cooperation between trade unions and management only can help to achieve the objectives of the organization. My appointment in the board of directors of Nepal Telecom is the result of the continuous pressure of trade unions who are working to grow this feel in the telecommunications sector.

**You are an established leader in the professional movement. As the role of a professional association representative and director of the organization differ from each other, how will you balance the roles?**

As I have already said, it is a challenging responsibility for me. I am very much sensitive towards the fact that any of my activity can impact the dignity of Association positively or negatively. In the board of directors of Nepal Telecom, I represent entire telecommunication sector workers and not as an individual. The major objective of the board of directors and trade union is progress of the institution. There will be no problem in policy decisions when both objectives are the same. I will try to create ethical and logical pressure as a professional representative for the rights of all employees and the health of the company.

**You are also the Founder President and current Advisor of INCEA. What differences you during your leadership period and the present situation of the trade union movement?**

The unified professional movement had progressed even though the laws and rules related to trade unions were not formulated when I was leading INCEA. There was a confusion related to obligation and responsibility of professional unions. The professional union movement faced division due to national politics. The professional/trade unions now have sensed the national, social and institutional responsibilities and their creative activities have increased. It is also being felt that the management of organizations has started thinking positively that participation of professional union speeds up the development of organizations.

**It seems the role of national-level professional unions is contracting with the privatization of the public corporations. What will be the strong and effective roles of national-level professional unions in this context? Can you give some suggestions?**

The appointment of inexperienced cadres of political parties in the management-level of corporations across the country and turning the institutions into recruitment centers of political cadres by the past governments resulted into collapse of the corporations.

To hide its own weaknesses, the government in the name of privatization has adopted wrong financial policy and sold the corporations in cheap price which has not given any benefit to the nation. After doing that, the government adopted the policy to hand over the management of troubled corporations on contract. The managements of two big commercial banks have already been handed over on the contract basis and this policy has also proved to be a failure.

Professional unions should raise their voice against the policies of His Majesty's Government that can end the existence of public corporations. I think the government needs to adopt the policy for multiple level investments to the joint efforts of the staff working in public

corporations, private sector, the government itself including foreign investment for fostering technology and capable management in the institutions. Doing these things will ensure the existence of the institutions, employees, and professional unions. If the public corporations are turned into companies with joint venture investment modality, it will benefit the society and people; and the impact of this will stay among the people for a long time.

**Lastly, the employees might have many expectations as you have been appointed as the representative of professional union in the board of directors. Beside the collective interest for employees, how much pressure you have been facing for personal favors such as in providing promotion, transfer, permanent appointment and facilities to somebody?**

It is obvious that employee colleagues discuss their problems with me. But it won't be appropriate to resolve issues of all employees using my access. They should put their problems in front of the union as well as with management and the issues need to be resolved from there. It could weaken the role of professional union and could impact its dignity if I directly start solving problems of employee colleagues. As my concerns are more towards policy level matters to ensure collective interest of the professionals of Nepal Telecom as well as company, I have asked them to get their personal problems resolved through the professional union.