

2024

Seminar on Strategies for Dynamic, Effective and Development-Oriented Foreign Policy



Organized by:

AFCAN, AFNA & FIPMO

Rapporteur:

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1. Background

The Association of Former Career Ambassadors of Nepal (AFCAN), the Association of Former Nepali Ambassadors (AFNA), and the Forum of Former International Professionals of Multilateral Organizations (FIPMO) jointly organized a half-day seminar titled “***Strategies for a Dynamic, Effective, and Development-Oriented Foreign Policy***” on May 7th, 2024. The seminar featured the illustrious presence of Dr. Bhekh Bahadur Thapa, who was also the keynote speaker. Ambassador Dr. Shambhu Ram Simkhada and Prof. Dr. Meena Vaidhya Malla served as key commentators on the keynote speech presented by Dr. Thapa.

The program was moderated by Ambassador Mr. Bhim Udas, who highlighted the seminar's objectives. He emphasized the necessity of an effective foreign policy and strategies to achieve the country's national interests. Ambassador Udas then invited Ambassador Mr. Bhagirath Basnet to deliver his welcome speech and share insights on the dynamics of foreign policy. Basnet remarked on the numerous foreign policy documents developed in Nepal over the years, highlighting the lack of serious follow-up. He stressed the need for cooperation over confrontation in the current era. He further emphasized the need for stability in the domain of Foreign Policy in Nepal in light of the frequent changes of government.



Ambassador Basnet further said that the foreign policy of a country should be about sharing perspectives, expressing concern and expectation and, above all, finding a common ground that will help develop a country. He added, modern diplomacy can no longer be conducted by diplomats alone. With the widening scope of international relations, many actors such as civil society, business communities, think tanks, media, and even individuals can significantly impact the way the foreign policy is conducted.

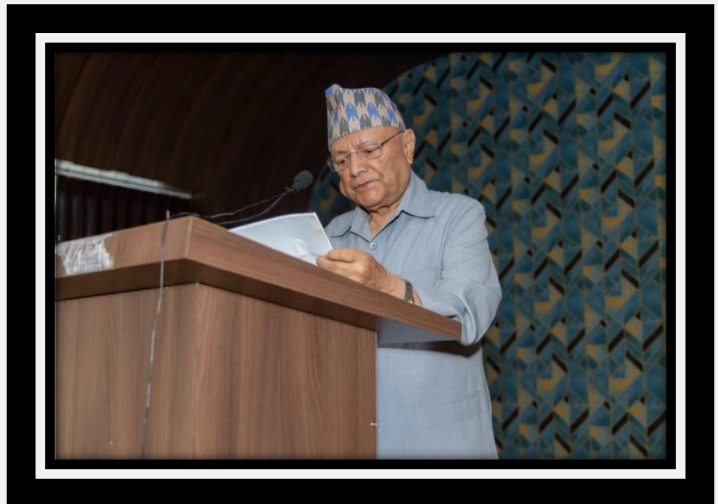


Following this, Ambassador Basnet introduced the keynote speaker, Dr. Bhekh Bahadur Thapa, highlighting his extensive engagement in various public posts in Nepal, including as Former Ambassador, Former Foreign Minister, Former Finance Minister, Former Secretary of the National Planning Commission as well as of the Former Finance Ministry, Former Governor of Nepal Rastra Bank, Former UN Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka, and Chairman of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) until recently.

2. Key note speech given by Dr. Bhekh Bahadur Thapa

He began his speech by expressing his gratitude for being in a seminar filled with key players of foreign policy who have served the nation throughout their lives. He started by emphasizing King Prithvi Narayan Shah's famous quotation, "*Nepal is a yam between two boulders.*" He noted that during King Prithvi Narayan Shah's time, there were only two boulders, but now there are boulders everywhere, highlighting the crucial need for coordination among these major powers.

He mentioned Nepal's longstanding slogan of "*Bacha or Bachana Deu,*" indicating that Nepal has always based its foreign policy on Panchasheel principles of co-existence and harmony. Nepal has advocated for non-interference in others' affairs and expects the same in return. He noted that Nepal was once "*Small and Respected,*" but now there is a sense of "*inferiority complex,*" which is problematic. He summarized the New World Order after World War II and the formation of the United Nations for world peace, citing Nepal's engagement in the world stage starting from the 1950 revolutions for democracy and its adoption of Non-Aligned policies, which made Nepal responsive and a significant contributor to peacekeeping missions globally.



In his lecture, Dr. Bhekh Bahadur Thapa emphasized Nepal's historical approach to diplomacy, which is based on harmony, progress, and survival and is represented by the unifying symbol of two stone yams. He considers how Nepal has continued to survive and preserve its respected standing in the world despite the continuous internal and external changes that have occurred since unification.

He draws attention to important post-unification developments that have complicated foreign policy, like the end of colonialism and the rise of new countries. Drawing inspiration from the achievements of peaceful leaders after World War II and the UN's role in promoting peace and growth, Dr. Thapa views foreign policy as a collaborative and exchange process.

According to him, Nepal is regarded as a responsible member of the international community due to its history of survival and non-interference. Important occasions like the 1950 revolution and the Treaty of Sugauli gave Nepal new diplomatic dimensions and emphasized non-alignment in the face of political changes.

He added further that, Nepal has developed over many years into a reliable diplomatically on a worldwide scale, particularly since the onset of democracy. Its non-alignment policy—which has its roots in the Bandung Conference—has improved its diplomatic standing and made its position on conflicts more clear.

When discussing the current state of the world, Dr. Thapa points out that there is a greater chance of conflict and that major nations are involved. He emphasizes how crucial it is that Nepal maintain its neutrality and pursue peace. Nepal has a chance to enhance its international standing as a result of recent governance reforms. He urges deliberate action to resolve domestic political issues and preserve Nepal's great standing in the international community.

Finally, Dr. Thapa exhorts Nepal to keep its attention on peace and development, positioning itself as a non-aligned country and a global ally, driven by lessons learned from the past and demands of the present.

He highlighted the current precarious situation globally, with powerful countries directly and indirectly involved in conflicts, increasing the possibility of larger conflicts. He connected this to Nepal, stating that internal political dynamics have made the implementation of Nepal's foreign policy challenging. He concluded his speech by recalling a famous quotation from former US President Ronald Reagan during Late King Birendra's state visit to the US, where Reagan referred to Nepal as a neighbor on the other side of the globe.

[A written statement that Dr. Thapa had prepared for the occasion is annexed]

3. Comments by Prof. Dr. Meena Vaidya Malla

She began her speech by stating, ***"It is a lifetime opportunity for me to comment on the paper presented by eminent personalities like Dr. Bhekh Bahadur Thapa."*** She further expressed her humility in attempting to do justice to his illustrious work. She clarified that her intention was not to comment on Dr. Thapa's paper but to add insights to his keynote speech.

As an academican, she shared her research on the conduct and theories of foreign policy, acknowledging the key role played by the personalities present in implementing these policies. She noted the positive changes in Nepal's history and its adherence to morality and ethics in foreign policy, as highlighted by Dr. Bhekh Bahadur Thapa. She elaborated on Nepal's foreign policy framework based on the '3C's: Continuity,



Change, and Challenge.

As the Continuity, she emphasized Nepal's adherence to the Non-Aligned Movement as well as the Principles of Panchasheel and respect for International Law. Regarding Change, she mentioned world's transition from a bi-polar to a multi-polar world and the shifting economic magnet from West to East. She discussed the geopolitical tensions faced by Nepal due to initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by China and the Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) by the US, highlighting the security challenges they pose.

She noted Nepal's strategic location between India and China, transitioning from being land-locked to land-linked, and aspiring to be a vibrant bridge between these two giants. She stressed that foreign policy is intricately linked to geography and history, emphasizing that today's geopolitics is essentially the politics of geography.

She mentioned the lack of implementation and emphasized the need for a cutting-edge strategy to implement foreign policies effectively. She criticized the prevalent mindset in Nepal that prioritizes "*Whom you know?*" over "*What you know?*", which undermines meritocracy.

4. Comments by Dr. Shambhu Ram Simkhada

He began his speech by praising Dr. Thapa's comments about "*It's a unique gathering*" and then proceeded to mention Dr. Thapa's latest book title, "*Rastra and Prarastra*". According to Dr. Simkhada, this book is a work to be, "*read, re-read, and in fact, re-read again*". He also lauded Dr. Bhekh Bahadur Thapa, referring to him as a historical figure whose abilities are unmatched, ensuring his legacy in various roles for generations to come.

He added that today's challenges require deeper reflection, contrasting it with a more sensationalist style of journalism epitomized by Mr. Rishi Dhamala. He aligned several key points with Dr. Thapa and Prof. Dr. Malla's speeches, noting Nepal's dynamic foreign policy that has expanded diplomatic relations from 5 countries in the 1950s to almost 183 in 2024. However, he questioned whether this dynamism aligns with the promotion of Nepal's national interests.



While discussing Nepal's influence, he questioned whether Nepalese dignity has increased or decreased, citing the strength of Nepali passports as a basic measure. He highlighted the challenges faced by ordinary passport holders in contrast to diplomatic passport holders, emphasizing the difficulties for ordinary Nepalis to travel abroad.

Dr. Simkhada also referenced famous quotations such as *‘Revenge of Geography’* and *‘Reward of Geography’*, exploring how Nepal can benefit strategically from its geographical position amid the interests of major powers like India, China, and the US. He noted the ideological rivalry between the US and China and emphasized the importance of navigation for Nepal, given its proximity to China and its global aspirations.

He further added, “Nepal's Foreign Policy has been quite dynamic. But the question arises: How effectively has this dynamism served our supreme national interest? To understand this, we need to measure it in terms of its contribution to enhancing the dignity of Nepal and the Nepali people, reflections on the interface between Nepal's domestic politics and foreign policy, relative shifts in national power interests and paradigms, and our capability to protect vital national interests and respond to evolving geopolitical challenges.” He discussed the interface between domestic politics and foreign policy, highlighting how changes in either sphere can impact the other.

Finally, citing the comparative figure illustrating a higher number of leaders taking executive roles in Nepal; he emphasized the role of people and institutions in building prosperous nations as well as advocating for institutional development. He cited the number of leaders who came to power in China(5 leaders), India (15 leaders) and Nepal (48 leaders) from 1947 to 2024, illustrating the political instability in Nepal through the comparatively higher number of leaders taking executive roles.

5. Floor Open

After Dr. Simkhada's speech, the floor was opened for questions and answers. The participants raised valid questions and provided valuable observations. Here are some key points:

One of the question raised by participants, *“Nepal began its planned development in 1956 when the economic conditions of our neighbors were similar to ours. However, the current situation is vastly different. Why have we failed? We need to take this observation seriously.”*

In response, Dr. Bhekh Bahadur Thapa remarked that while progress has been made compared to the past, more efforts are still needed.

Another participant expressed the need for a development-oriented foreign policy based on Conduct, Coherence, and Consistency. Prof. Dr. Malla emphasized the, *“Importance of inter-ministerial coordination to achieve foreign policy objectives, highlighting that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs alone cannot accomplish this.”*



Another participant suggested focusing on Nepal's interests first and harmonizing foreign policy with global treaties to avoid compromising our national interests.

Regarding the EPG report, one participant noted India's lack of interest in settling the border dispute, advising Nepal to engage diplomatically rather than provoke for political gains. Dr. Thapa expressed optimism about the report's acceptance by the Indian government.

One commentator suggested that there is no dearth of study reports on various aspects of Nepal's foreign policy, including Economic Diplomacy done in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry would do well to document these reports systematically for reference and its use as valuable inputs for policy recommendations.

Prof. Dr. Malla, while answering the question, mentioned weak leadership capacity, attributing it to a focus on power games that result in poor state capacity and vulnerable foreign policy implementation.

Another participant pointed out Nepal's weak strategy leading to India not engaging in agendas related to Lipulkeh, Kalapani, or border disputes.



6. Closing Remarks

Mr. Bhairaja Pandey, President of FIPMO, gave closing remarks, stating that the world is driven by interests and has less affection for morality. He further added that if a country is irrelevant, diplomacy becomes futile, as no country wants to recognize us. Finally, he thanked all the members who supported the organizing this seminar, including the keynote speaker, commentators, and participants. Subsequently, the organizers presented tokens of appreciation to the keynote speaker and commentators.



Annex 1

डा भेष बहादुर थापाबाट प्राप्त उहाँले दिनुभएको मन्तव्यको लिखित स्वरूप

यो वैद्विक समुदाय जसमा नेपालको कुटनीति र वैद्विक विकासमा उल्लेखनीय योगदान गरेको बीच आफूलाई पाउँदा भाग्यशाली ठानेको छु । नेपालको कुटनीतिको सार “बाँच, प्रगतिमा योगदान गर र बाँकी विश्वसँग सद्भाव गर” भन्ने विषयहरुमा सीमित रहेको इतिहास छ । नेपालको एकीकरणको क्रममा अग्रगामी भूमिका खेलेका व्यक्तिले मुलुकलाई दुई ढुङ्गाको तरुलको संकेत दिएको कुराबाट इतिहासको शुरुवात हुन्छ । त्यो बेलामा सान्दर्भिक अभिव्यक्ति अहिले आएर त्यसको व्यापकतालाई विस्तारित रूपमा हामी पाउँछौं र ढुङ्गा जताततै भएको र त्यसले ल्याएको चुनौतिको सामना गर्ने जिम्मेवारी नयाँ पुस्ताहरुलाई व्यापकता तिर धकेलेको र चुनौतिपूर्ण अवस्था रहेको हामी सवैले अनुभव गरेको कुरा हो । विषयमा प्रवेश गर्दा मैले आफ्नो अनुभवको आधारमा केही कुराहरु राख्दै आजको भेलालाई बहुपक्षीय सम्वाद र विश्लेषणको रूपमा लिन आग्रह गर्छु ।

एकीकरण देखि अहिलेसम्म भित्र र बाहिर निरन्तर परिवर्तन भएको र ती सबै हुँदाहुँदै पनि आफ्नो अस्तित्व जोगाएको र विश्व समुदायमा सानो तर सम्मानित ठाउँ ओगटेर आजको अवस्थामा पुगेको र यसलाई निरन्तरता दिने जिम्मा आजको भावी पुस्ताले गहन गर्नेछन् भन्ने अभिव्यक्तिबाट शुरु गर्दछु ।

एकीकरण पछि छिमेकमा भएको परिवर्तनका उतार चढाव र बाँकी विश्वमा भएको हलचल र द्वन्द्वबाट पिडीत भएर दोश्रो विश्वयुद्ध पछि उपनिवेशको अन्त्य र नयाँ नयाँ देशहरुको उदयले गर्दा विदेश नीति हरेक मुलुकको लागि चुनौतिपूर्ण हुँदै गएको देखिन्छ ।

ज्यादै टाढा नगएर आफ्नो जीवनकालमा भएका घटनाका आधारमा यो प्रस्तुति गर्दा यसलाई सहकार्यको रूपमा र आदानप्रदानको अपेक्षा गरेको छु ।

दोश्रो विश्वयुद्धपछि त्यसकालका वैद्विक नेतृत्वहरुले अर्को विश्वयुद्ध नहोस् भन्नको लागि गरेका संरचनाहरु र वैद्विक अभ्यासबाट जन्मिएको संयुक्त राष्ट्र संघ लगायत विभिन्न संरचनाहरु र वैद्विक आधारहरुलाई अंगीकार गरेर New World Order को परिकल्पना प्रस्तुत गरेका थिए । त्यसले लामो अवधिसम्म आक्कल झुक्कल हिंसा र परिवर्तन भएपनि लामो अवधिसम्म शान्ति र प्रगतिलाई अगाडी सारेर मानवीय सोचाईलाई आधार मानेर राष्ट्रको समूहमा एकल वा विश्वव्यापी संरचना गर्न सफल भएको इतिहास छ । ती संरचनाहरुको संरक्षण र पालना गर्ने जिम्मा संयुक्त राष्ट्र संघको माध्यमबाट विश्वका सवै राष्ट्रहरुले मार्गदर्शनको रूपमा लिएर अहिलेसम्म मार्गदर्शन र त्यसलाई अपनाउने जमर्को गरेको इतिहास छ ।

नेपाल राज्यको एकीकरण पछि लामो अवधिसम्म बच र बचाउको सिद्धान्तलाई अपनाएर कसैको आँखा नलाग्ने र आफ्नोपनलाई निरन्तरता दिने नीति अपनाएर आफू जोडिएर बसेको पनि इतिहास छ र हामी त्यही क्रमका नयाँ पुस्ताको रुपमा रहेका छौं ।

त्यही क्रममा विश्वव्यापी राजनीतिक परिवर्तनको प्रादुर्भाव पछि उपनिवेशको अन्त र नयाँ राज्यहरुको प्रादुर्भावबाट नयाँ कुटनैतिक आयामको शुरुवात भएको देखिन्छ । त्यही क्रममा छिमेकमा भएको परिवर्तन र उपनिवेशबाट मुक्ती पाएपछि नेपालले पनि आफ्नो अस्तित्व र कुटनैतिक अभ्यासको महशुस गरेर क्रमशः विश्वको मानचित्रमा आफ्नो छवि र अस्तित्वलाई संरक्षण गर्ने लक्ष्य अप्रायो र कार्यान्वयनमा अग्रसर भयो ।

नेपालको पहिचान साम्राज्यसँग सम्झौता गरेर युद्धपछि सुँघौली सन्धिबाट नयाँ आयामको शुरुवात भएको इतिहास छ । त्यसपछि भएका घटनाहरु लिपिवद्ध छन् र नयाँ आयामको शुरुवातको इतिहास छ ।

२००७ सालको क्रान्तिले नेपाल नयाँ आयाममा प्रवेश गरेको छ र नेपालको भूमिकाले क्रमशः विश्वव्यापी रुपमा जिम्मेवारी र कर्तव्य बहन गर्ने नयाँ अध्यायको शुरुवात भएको देखिन्छ । त्यसपछि भएका घटनाहरु र परिवर्तनहरुले नेपाललाई आधुनिकी जगतको सहकर्मीको रुपमा प्रस्तुत गरेको छ र त्यसैको पालना र परिपूर्तिमा अहमं भूमिका खेल्दै आएको छ । धेरै राजनैतिक उथलपुथल र छिमेकमा घटेको घटनाहरु र विश्वले परिकल्पना गरेको मुल्य मान्यतालाई आधार मानेर वैधानिक प्रक्रियाको माध्यमबाट आफ्नो सही पहिचान र उत्तरदायित्व बहन गर्ने नेपालको विदेश नीति असंलग्नताको सिद्धान्तलाई अपनाएर एक जिम्मेवार राष्ट्रको रुपमा प्रस्तुत गरेको छ ।

सात सालको क्रम र त्यस वरिपरि भएका छिमेक र विश्व मुल्य मान्यतालाई मानेर कुटनैतिक प्रक्रियाबाट विश्वको सहयात्री मुलुकको रुपमा आफूलाई प्रस्तुत गरेको छ र त्यसले निरन्तरता पाएका छौं । प्रजातान्त्रिक पद्धतिको शुरुवातको साथसाथै कुटनैतिक तहमा व्यापक विस्तार र चुनौतिको सामना गर्दै नेपाल आज सानो र अपरिचित देशबाट विश्वव्यापी रुपमा सहयात्रीको रुपमा पुऱ्याएको छ र जुन कुराको निरन्तरता भावी पुस्ताको काँधमा परिमार्जन सहित आएको छ ।

असंलग्नता

कुटनैतिक रुपमा नेपालले छलाङ्ग मारेको असंलग्न राष्ट्रहरुको प्रादुर्भाव र त्यसमा नेपालले खेलेको भूमिकाले नेपाललाई नयाँ उचाईमा पुऱ्याएको र त्यसले ल्याएको विस्तार र परिमार्जनलाई अग्रता दिएर वाह्य तनाव र झैझगडामा शान्ति बहाली गर्ने देखि लिएर आफ्नो धारणा स्पष्ट गर्ने जिम्मेवारी नेपालले दर्शाएको छ । वास्तवमा असंलग्नता जुन कुरा वान्छुङ्ग समूहले अपनाएको थियो नेपालको लागि मार्गदर्शन र विश्वव्यापी सहयात्रीको रुपमा प्रस्तुत गरेको छ ।

राजनैतिक द्वन्द्व र परिवर्तनको वावजुद नेपालले आफ्नो विदेश नीतिलाई मुलमन्त्रको रुपमा लिएर असंलग्नताको प्रतिपादन गरेको छ र त्यसले निरन्तरता पाउने संकेत स्पष्ट रुपमा देखा

परेको छ । संयुक्त राष्ट्र संघको शान्ति सेनामा अग्रगामी भूमिका खेलेको कुराको सहाहना संयुक्त राष्ट्र संघको अभिव्यक्ति र नेपालले पाएको सहाहना र सद्भाव असंलग्नताको परिचय र उपलब्धी हो ।

आज विश्व नयाँ चुनौतिको संघारमा पुगेको र विगतमा भएका मुल्य मान्यता र सहकार्यमा अद्वितीय चुनौति र व्यापक द्वन्द्वको दुर्भाग्यपूर्ण सृजना भएको र चिन्तनीय विषयको रुपमा देखा परेको छ । हिजोको संरचना र मुल्य मान्यताको प्रतिपादन गर्नुको सट्टा क्षेत्रीय तथा राष्ट्रको समूहको झैझगडाले विश्वलाई नै चिन्तित अवस्थामा पुऱ्याएको छ । आज विश्वको विभिन्न भागमा घटेका घटनाहरु र युद्धस्तरको द्वन्द्वले गर्दा विश्वव्यापी चिन्तन र चुनौतिको सृजना भएको छ । विगतका दशकहरुमा भएको छुटपुट द्वन्द्वहरुको दाँजोमा अहिले देखिएका समस्याहरुले नयाँ विश्व युद्धको संघारमा पुऱ्याउने लक्षण देखा परेका छन् र यो विश्वव्यापी चिन्तनको विषय भएको छ ।

विश्वका शक्तिशाली राष्ट्रहरु अहिले देखेका द्वन्द्वहरुमा प्रत्यक्ष वा अप्रत्यक्ष रुपमा सामेल भएका देखिन्छ । यसले ल्याएको चिन्तन र यसबाट पर्ने लक्षणहरु सवैको जिम्मेवारी भए तापनि शक्तिशाली राष्ट्रहरु नै प्रत्यक्ष अप्रत्यक्ष रुपमा संलग्न भएको कारणले गर्दा द्वन्द्वले अर्को गहिराईमा पुऱ्याउला भन्ने लक्षण देखिन्छ । यो परिस्थितिलाई मनन गरेर यसमा पक्षधर नहुने तर शान्तिको खोजीमा सहयोग गर्ने नीति नेपालले विगतमा पनि अपनाएको र अहिले पनि अपनाउनुपर्ने परिस्थितिको सृजना भएको छ ।

राजनैतिक हिसावबाट नेपालमा शासन व्यवस्था परिवर्तनशील रहेको र स्थिर र प्रभावकारी शासनको जग बन्दै गएको बेलामा नेपालले पुनः आफ्नो भूमिकालाई विगतका सकारात्मक अभ्यासलाई अझ प्रभावकारी रुपमा अधि सार्ने अवस्थाको सृजना भएको छ । आन्तरिक राजनैतिक द्वन्द्वबाट विदेशमा असर गर्ने कुरामा सवै राजनैतिक र वैद्विक समुदायले चेतनशील अभ्यासमा लागेर नेपालको भूमिकालाई सहाहनीय अवस्थामा पुऱ्याउने चुनौति छ ।

शीतयुद्धपछि नयाँ विश्व परिवेशको परिकल्पना गर्ने चुनाव संसारकै वैद्विक समयदाको अगाडी चुनौति रहेको छ । आजको चिन्तनीय अवस्थाबाट पार गरेर शान्ति र प्रगति र मानवीय सोचाईलाई मुलमन्त्रको रुपमा लिने र आफू जोगिने र अरुको पिडामा मल्हम लगाउने अभ्यास नेपालको अगाडी देखा परेको छ ।

अन्तमा, नेपालको विदेश नीति आफू द्वन्द्वबाट जोगिने र शान्ति बहालीको लागि योगदान गर्ने लक्ष लिएर विश्व समुदायको शान्ति र प्रगतिको लागि योगदान गर्ने लक्षलाई विगतमा झै निरन्तरता दिने अवसर प्राप्त भएको छ । हाम्रो आफ्नै अनुभवबाट विगतमा भएका अभ्यासहरुबाट सिकेर असंलग्न र प्रगतिमा सहयात्रीको रुपमा नेपाललाई प्रस्तुत गर्ने लक्ष्य अधि राख्नु र त्यसलाई सही मोड दिनु आजको आवश्यकता हो.