



INDIA-NEPAL STRATEGIC RELATIONS

Vipula

Assistant Professor, Department of Defence Studies, Dayanand PG College, Hisar, Haryana (India)

ABSTRACT

India shares a special relationship with Nepal as both the countries have open borders, common culture, people to people contact, etc. but both the countries have witnessed many ups and downs in their age-old relationship, for one or the other reasons. The relationship got strained when India objected to Nepal's new constitution and supported Madhesis Concerns. China offered to help Nepal in the wake of Nepal blockade and rescued Nepal from the crisis. Nepal is also trying to use China to counter India's hegemony in Nepal. Since Nepal's adoption of new constitution and formation of government under the leadership of communist leader KP Oli 2015, the relationship between India and Nepal got strained. China-Nepal closeness raised concerns for India, as India considers Nepal as a part of its northern security system. This paper attempts to highlight the relations between India and Nepal post new constitution of Nepal and how the approach and attitude of Nepal government changed because of Chinese influence.

KEYWORDS : Relationship, Concerns, Constitution, Influence.**INTRODUCTION**

India and Nepal initiated their relationship with the 1950 Indo-Nepal treaty of peace and friendship and accompanying secret letters that defined security relations between the two countries and an agreement governing both bilateral trade and trade transiting Indian Territory.

When a devastating 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal on 25 April 2015 (followed by a powerful aftershock of 7.4 magnitude on 12th May 2015) the Government of India swiftly dispatched National Disaster Response Force teams and special aircrafts with rescue and relief materials to Nepal. India's assistance, which reached Nepal within six hours of the earthquake, included 16 NDRF teams, 39 IAF aircraft sorties with 571 tons of relief material including rescue equipment, medical supplies, food, water, tents, blankets and tarpaulin. Medical teams from India were deployed in various parts of Nepal. Indian relief assistance to Nepal amounted to approx US\$67 Million.

In February 2016, a MOU on utilization of the Grant of US\$250 Million was signed. Government of India is supporting 50,000 housing beneficiaries in Nuwakot and Gorkha districts and will reconstruct retrofit 70 higher secondary schools, 2 libraries over 150 health facilities and 28 cultural heritage secondary schools, 2 libraries over 150 health facilities and 28 cultural heritage sector projects. MOUs for implementation of projects in these sectors were signed during PM Deuba's visit to India in August 2017. Similar, in September 2016, a line of Credit Agreement for post-earthquake reconstruction projects for US\$750 million was signed. The line of credit was operationalised in February 2017.

The New Constitution of Nepal

Nepal got its seventh and new constitution on 20th September 2015. New constitution has been enacted after eight year of interim constitution. It has 308 articles, 35 parts and 9 schedules. It was adopted by overwhelming majority of 507 out of 598 members of the constituent assembly. The constitution enshrines the principle of republicanism, federalism, secularism and inclusiveness. It incorporates the proportional representations of ensure that women untouchables and marginalized groups like jantatis and the Madhesis find representation in the national assembly. It also grants fundamental rights, freedom to its citizens and there would be independent judiciary, nominated by judicial commission. In spite of having such good features, it becomes a controversial document disapproved by different groups like Madhesi, Janajati etc. Each group has its own reason for its disapproval. Main agitating groups are the Madhes parties, woman, Janjati group, splintered extremist Maoist, Hindu fundamentalist and monarchists.

India's Response to New Constitution of Nepal

India was not so excited about the new constitution of Nepal as it did not fulfill the demands of the marginalized groups of the country particularly Madhes. According to the official statement issued by the Ministry of external Affairs of India on 20th September 2015 it says. "Throughout the process of constitution making in Nepal, India has

supported a federal, democratic republican and inclusive constitution. We note the promulgation of a constitution in Nepal today." India just 'Noted' but did not 'welcome' it (Kumar, 2015 Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had paid visit to Nepal and invited Nepali leadership like Sher Bahadur Deuba of constitution and strengthened India-Nepal relations. Both the leaders promised to take Madhesi and other groups along in the process but new constitution was totally different from what it was promised. Indian government felt betrayed when the Nepali leaders did not honour the promises, they had made to them in the official meetings rather, when agitations started in the Terai region, Nepali leadership started blaming Indian government for inciting disturbance in the region. India government denied all the internal disturbance in Nepal's own territory.

Exchange of Visits:- From Nepal

- At the cordial invitation of the then president of India Shri Pranab Mukherjee, the Rt. Hon'ble Bidya Devi Bhandari, President of Nepal paid a state visit to India in April 2017.
- Ram Baran Yadav, as the first President of Nepal, paid a state visit to India in February 2010 at the invitation of Ms. Pratibha Devi Singh Patil, the then president of India.
- At the invitation of His Excellency Shri Narendra Modi Prime Minister of India, The Rt. Hon'ble K. P. Sharma Oli, Prime Minister of Nepal, paid a state visit to India on 6-8 April 2018. Earlier also, he had paid a State visit to India in February 2016.
- At the invitation of the Prime Minister of India, His Excellency Shri Narendra Modi, the then Prime Minister of Nepal Mr. Sher Bahadur Deuba paid a state visit to India in August 2017.
- The then Prime Minister of Nepal, Ms. Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' paid a state visit to India in September 2016 and also visited India in October 2016 to participate in the BRICS-BIMSTEC outreach Summit in Goa, India.
- The then Prime Minister of Nepal Mr. Sushil Koirala visited India to attend the Swearing in ceremony of the Prime Minister elect Shri Narendra Modi in May 2019.
- The then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Krishna Bahadur Mahara visited India in July 2017 at the invitation of Her Excellency Smt. Sushma Swaraj, Minister of external affairs of India.
- Then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Prakash Sharan Mahat visited India in October 2016 leading a Nepali delegation to participate in the 7th meeting of Nepal-India Joint Commission.
- Then Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr. Prakash, Sharan Mahat visited India in September 2016.
- The then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Kamal Thapa visited India in November 2016.

From India:-

- The then president of India Shri Pranab Mukherjee paid a state visit to Nepal in November 2016.
- At the invitation of the Prime Minister Mr. Sushil Koirala, the Prime Minister of India His Excellency Shri Narendra Modi paid

Principal
Dayanand College
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an official visit to Nepal in August 2014.

- His Excellency Prime Minister Modi also visited Nepal in November 2014 to participate in the 18th SAARC Summit.
- At the invitation of the then Foreign Minister Mr. Mahendra Bahadur Pandey, the External Affairs Minister of India Smt. Sushma Swaraj paid an official visit to Nepal in July 2014 to participate in the third meeting of the Nepal-India Joint Commission.
- Her Excellency Smt. Swaraj visited Nepal in June 2015 to participate in the international conference on Nepal's Reconstruction and in August 2017 to participate in the 15th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting.

Defence Cooperation

India and Nepal have wide-ranging cooperation in the defence sector. India has been assisting the Nepal Army (NA) in its modernization by supplying equipment and providing training. Assistance during disasters, joint military exercises, adventure activities and bilateral visits are other aspects of India's defence cooperation with Nepal. A number of defence personnel from Nepal Army attend training courses in various Indian Army training institutions. The 'Indo-Nepal Battalion-level' Joint Military Exercise SURYA KIRAN was conducted alternately in India and in Nepal. The 13th Surya Kiran exercise was held in Pithoragarh (India) in May-June 2018. Since 1950, India and Nepal have been awarding each other's Army Chief with the honorary rank of General in recognition of the mutual harmonious relationship between the two armies.

The Gorkha regiments of the Indian Army are raised partly by recruitment from hill districts of Nepal. Currently, about 32,000 Gorkha Soldiers from Nepal are serving in the Indian Army. In 2017-18, pensions in excess of INR 2923 Crores (NPT 4677 Crores) were disbursed by the Indian Army to about 1,25,000 retired Gorkha soldiers and civilian pensioners, who had served in the Indian Army and other central and state services. In 2018-19, pensions in excess of INR 1682 Crores (NPR 2692 Crores) has been disbursed till 30 September 2018. In addition to Military Pension Branch in Kathmandu, there are two Pension Paying Offices at Pokhara and Dharan, and 22 District Soldier Board in Nepal, all functioning under the Defence Wing of the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu, which arrange the disbursement of pensions and organize welfare programmes for re-training, rehabilitating and assisting ex-Gorkha soldiers and their families.

India's Development Assistance to Nepal

Government of India's development assistance to Nepal is a broad-based programme focusing on creation of infrastructure at the grass-roots level, under which various projects have been implemented in the areas of infrastructure, health, water resources, education and rural & community development. In recent years, India has been assisting Nepal in development of border infrastructure through upgradation of 10 roads in the Terai Area; development of cross-border rail links at Jogbani-Biratnagar, Jaynagar-Bardibas; and establishment of Integrated Check Posts at Birgunj, Biratnagar, Bhairahawa and Nepalgunj. The total economic assistance earmarked under 'Aid to Nepal' budget for FY 2017-18 was Rs. 375 Crore. A total of Rs. 730 crore was allocated under the 'Aid to Nepal' budget head for FY 2018-19.

Over 552 large, intermediate and small scale projects at an estimated cost of NPR 77 billion have been implemented across Nepal with Indian assistance since 1951. Till date India has gifted 752 ambulances and 148 school buses to various institutions and health posts across Nepal's 77 districts.

Apart from grant assistance, Government of India has extended Lines of Credit of USD 1.65 billion for undertaking development of infrastructure, including post-earthquake reconstruction.

CONCLUSION

There are many bold possibilities; maybe there could be joint deployment of military and police forces, as during the 1960s on the Nepal-China border. Given the trade potential, both countries could also consider establishing a special economic zone. Finally, it is in the interest of both that Indian and Nepali pilgrims can use the improved infrastructure in the Kalapani region to reach Mount Kailash.

Hostile states have been able to find such innovative solutions in other parts of the world and, at one point, India and Pakistan were close to

finding solutions for Siachen or to make borders irrelevant in Kashmir. Based on their history of friendly relations and driven by pragmatism, it should not be difficult for India and Nepal to think out of the box and find a practical solution. Delhi and Kathmandu could lead the way to liberate the subcontinent from the sovereignist, nationalist and territorial logic that continues to leave everyone in the region worse off.

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