



India-Nepal Ties: Past, Present & Future!

Relevancy

- ✓ G.S. Paper 2,3
- ✓ India-Nepal ties
- ✓ Nepal's political history
- ✓ Recent elections in Nepal

Recently:

- ❖ The new Nepali PM K.P. Sharma Oli visited India in his 1st foreign trip, which is now a longstanding tradition for Nepali PMs.
- ❖ While Mr. Oli had a run in with India during his previous stint at the helm, he has currently displayed pragmatism by overlooking the bitterness of the past.

A brief synopsis of Nepal's chequered political history:-

- Nepal's political transition began nearly three decades ago when it adopted a new constitution in 1990 which ushered in multiparty democratic monarchy.
- But the rise of a violent Maoist insurgency that claimed 15,000 lives had eroded stability and the small democratic gains made.
- Reconciliation with the Maoists started in 2005, and a subsequent multi-party mass public uprising also saw the abolishing of the 250 year old monarchy.
- Following this, a constituent assembly was elected for drafting the statutes for the new republic, but the process proved to be long and turbulent.
- This seven-year exercise finally produced a new constitution in 2015 and several elections were held in 2017 and early 2018.
- Significantly, the local body elections were held after a gap of 20 years as political instability had hindered any chance of local governance.

How did the recent election results fare?

- Nepal has seen 25 PM in the past 27 years due to multiple coalition troubles and other political nefarious political bickering.
- However Mr. Oli's UML party seems to have won big this time, which promises the much desired political stability and could be a break from the chequered trend of the past.
- In the parliament, the UML alliance has secured a convincing majority of 174/275 in lower house and the alliance has a 42/59 in the upper house.
- Additionally, the UML had secured 294 of the 753 local bodies and most of the provinces also have UML CMs.

How Mr. Oli's rise is going to impact India?

- Earlier when Mr. Oli had began his 1st term as PM (that lasted just 9 months), the Madhesi agitations were at its peak.
- Madhesis had protested against certain clauses in the new constitution, and India was accused of tacitly backing the agitators.
- All this created much bitterness between India and Nepal and Mr. Oli was openly reaching out to China as a counter-balance to India.
- Even in Mr. Oli's election campaigns, there was a distinguishable anti-India Nepali nationalist tinge, which added to his popular appeal.
- But after the comfortable win that has secured his position domestically, Mr. Oli has been visibly shrewd in recognizing India's criticality.
- India too had realized the need to befriend the new leader to prevent a pro-China tilt in Nepal's polity and had proactively reached out to him.
- Consequently, Mr Oli has begun his 2nd turn with a positive outreach to India and is probably signaling his intention to look beyond the past tensions.
- As a result of all this back-track reconciliations, his recent visit was smooth, but a sustained engagement by both sides is required to restore complete trust.

What is special about the recent visit?



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- A short joint statement was issued which stressed the need for strengthening relations on the basis of “equality, mutual trust, and respect”.
- Multiple contentious issues like “a review of 1950 Treaty, recruitment of Nepali nationals in the Indian Army” did not find mention.
- Also, resolving the fallout of India’s demonetisation exercise that devalued a large trove of Nepali Central Bank’s Indian currency reserves wasn’t remarked.
- Madhesh issues, delays in hydel projects like Pancheshwar, and resumption of SAARC was also missed out.
- But despite all these, this seems to be progress from Mr. Oli’s Feb 2016 visit, when there was no Joint Statement at all.

What are the important bilateral projects between India and Nepal?

- For long, India has been Nepal’s biggest development partner, but the project implementation pace has been bad and there were also multiple cost overruns.
- While both India and Nepal have a shared responsibility in this tardy work, the political instability in Nepal had worsened the shabby track-record.
- **Hydel Projects** – Despite its humongous hydro-electric potential, Nepal’s installed capacity is less than 700 MW and it imports power from India.
- Over 60% of the Ganga waters come from Nepal’s rivers namely - Sarda, Ghagar, Rapti, Gandak, Bagmati, Kamala, Kosi and Mechi.
- Misrepresentations have delayed India collaborated hydel projects for long, and it’s imperative to resolve these issues and push these projects ahead.
- **ICP** - The proposal for 4 **Integrated Check Posts (ICP)** on the India-Nepal border to facilitate movement of goods, and people was mooted 15 years ago.
- An MOU for the same was signed in 2005 but multiple administrative and political constrains delayed construction and costs overshoot by 400%.
- As a result, only the Raxaul-Birgunj ICP has been completed and was inaugurated last week.
- **Petroleum Pipeline** - Motihari-Amlekhgunj cross-border pipeline has now been started after almost 15 years since the MOU was signed.
- Now, for the work to be completed within the planned 30 months, a brisk paced work and proper monitoring is needed.

What must India do to further strengthen India Nepal ties?

- Cultural and historical ties between the people in both countries are a big positive for the relationship, but there are other aspects too.
- Importantly, just like for India, globalisation offers multiple opportunities for Nepal too and it is only logical that Nepali leaders aspire to capitalize on them.
- In this context, China’s “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) currently appears attractive for the Nepali dispensation, despite some serious concerns.
- India would do good to recognize these aspirations and desires while simultaneously enhancing co-operation with our land-locked neighbour.
- Firstly, one should ensure that the ongoing projects like - border check-posts, rail connectivity, and Terai’s postal road network are executed to perfection.
- Secondly, what is now needed is effective delivery on the pending projects, the remaining ICPs, the five railway connections, postal road network in the Terai and the petroleum pipeline so that connectivity is enhanced and the idea of ‘inclusive development and prosperity’ assumes reality.



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National Forest Policy, 2018

Relevancy

- ✓ G.S. Paper 2
- ✓ About the policy and its context
- ✓ The biological diversity act 2002

Recently:

- ❖ India recorded a marginal increase in forest cover, according to the India State of Forest Report 2017.
- ❖ Around the same time this report was released, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change released a draft National Forest Policy, 2018.
- ❖ It calls for increasing forest cover, involving communities in forest management, and creating plantations for industrial use.

What is the context?

- Forest threats are identified by National Forest Policy.
- The report is released by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- It released a draft National Forest Policy, 2018, which calls for increasing forest cover, involving communities in forest management, and creating plantations for industrial use.
- The State of Forest Report says that forest cover had increased in India by 0.21% in 2017 from 2015, and that some areas had become 'Very Dense Forest' in this period.
- Two things are clear: Even if forest cover is being increased, it is also simultaneously being lost, and new forest may also be subsequently lost.

The Biological Diversity Act, 2002:

- This Act calls for setting up a Biodiversity Management Committee in each local body.
- The Committee will prepare **People's Biodiversity Registers (PBRs)**, with tribals as members or people living in natural areas not classified legally as forest.
- The Registers entail a complete documentation of biodiversity in the area — plants, food sources, wildlife, medicinal sources, etc.
- They are meant to enable the creation of local biodiversity funds for conservation, and aid in decision-making.
- A good PBR will not just be a powerful text, it can also help to trace how habitats are changing, and to understand and estimate parts of our forests.
- Being a bottom-up exercise, it is also a means of understanding the overlap of cultural and natural biodiversity.
- For instance, several Endemic Birds Areas, like in the Western Ghats, are those where tribals like the Todas live.
- These communities have specific ways of interacting with the environment and have helped conserve it in a sustainable way.
- Outside protected forest areas which are under immediate threat, PBRs will help identify forests that require conservation.

What is the forward?

- A golden chance of setting up a system of efficient natural area monitoring will be lost if PBRs and Biodiversity Management Committees are not integrated into the heart of the draft Forest Policy.
- The policy should take forward an existing legislation to achieve that elusive blend of tradition and modernity and also create digitised maps with truths from the ground.

Conclusion:

- The various threats to Forests due to encroachments, illegal tree felling, forests fires, invasive weeds, grazing, etc.
- A major concern is that existing forests should not be used for industrial use, as diversion is one of the biggest threats to forests.

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- A move towards decentralization of forest wealth which is beyond commerce and embraces cultural values and forgotten knowledge will provide transparency as well as an actual and heartfelt recognition of our heritage.



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Why India boycotts China's Belt Road Initiative

Relevancy

- ✓ G.S. Paper 2
- ✓ India's reason for boycott
- ✓ Major issues between India and China

Recently:

- ❖ The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) summit began in Beijing on Sunday, citing sovereignty, procedural and leadership issues.
- ❖ As many as 120 countries, including 29 at the top leadership level, attended the inaugural, underlining President Xi Jinping's description of this being the "project of the century."

Why India stayed away?

- India has cited the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which passes through Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir as the main reason for refusing to participate in the summit.
- Sovereignty and territorial integrity issues, which tie in with the nationalist nature of Prime Minister Modi's government, are clearly top of the agenda.

What are the major issues between India and China?

Sovereignty and territorial integrity issues

- China's sovereignty claims over the disputed South China Sea islands have led it to challenge the world.
- Also, President Xi, soon after taking over as the leader in 2012, suggested he will not sacrifice "core interests" for the sake of developmental interests.
- But the CPEC is not only a "commercial" project.
- The fact that the Chinese have begun to deploy 30,000 "security personnel" to protect the projects along the CPEC route makes it an active player in the politics of the Indian subcontinent.
- This clearly becomes the case of double standards.

One China policy and One India policy

- External Affairs minister Sushma Swaraj, soon after taking over in May 2014, told her counterpart Wang Yi that India's "One China" policy must be congruent to China's "One India" policy.
- It means that the Chinese must be sensitive to India's claims in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir.
- But the Chinese went ahead with the CPEC.

Transparency

- India has also expressed concern on the evolution of the BRI.
- The foreign ministry spokesperson pointed out that mutual agreements on infrastructure projects should be transparent and debt repayments be made easier for recipient countries.
- The latter element is fast emerging as the key ideological difference between the two Asian powers as they expand their sphere of influence in South Asia.

Issues at LoAC

- The context of this rising tension is important.
- Chinese troops have allegedly crossed the Line of Actual Control that separates India in April 2013, in September 2014 during Xi Jinping's visit to India, as well as in October 2015 and mid-2016.
- Chinese press reports say this was in response to the Indian logistics build-up and raising of a Strike Corps.
- Indian reports say it was only responding to a Chinese logistics build up in Tibet since the 1980s.

NSG

- More recently, China has been reluctant to proscribe Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Masood Azhar at the UN Security Council as well as refuse India full membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.
- India's decision to allow the Dalai Lama to visit Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh didn't go down well in Beijing.

India at AIIB



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- India is the second largest contributor to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which has allocated \$100 billion for BRI and also funds the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor.
- India has over 8 per cent voting rights at AIIB, and remains rightly concerned about the larger strategic issues of the BRI.

China's global ambitions

- At the BRI inaugural President Xi' said China would usher in a "new type of international relations".
- In June 2013 he had told former US president Barak Obama about China's intention to establish a "new type of major power relations" — suggesting that China's global ambitions had increased beyond the inward-looking US, depleting Russia and the crises-ridden European Union.
- But Xi also insisted that the BRI's objective is to build partnerships and not alliances.
- This opens the door for maneuverability, on China's part as well as on the part of countries like India.

Conclusion

- The battle for South Asia has been joined.
- India is clearly worried about China's expanding presence in its own neighbourhood – which it believed to be part of its own sphere of influence.
- But China's maritime understanding with Sri Lanka, its decision to sell eight submarines to Pakistan and enhance the facilities at Gwadar port, prowl the Indian Ocean with its submarines as well as build a base in Djibouti in Africa have enraged New Delhi.



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