

India and Nepal: Redefining a Relationship

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Abstract:

This research paper examines the historical, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of the Indo-Nepal relationship, analyzing the continuity and changes that have shaped this unique bilateral bond. The paper delves into the historical roots of the relationship, explores key turning points, and assesses the current situation. Through a comprehensive review of literature, official documents, and interviews with experts, the paper aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the dynamics that have defined Indo-Nepal relations and the factors contributing to both continuity and change.

Keywords: Diplomatic, Security, Dispute, Political, Trade

1. Introduction:

“Geography doesn't argue; it simply is.” Nepal's location defines its geopolitical importance. Nepal has emerged as the geopolitical heartland of Asia. The Indo-Nepal relationship is one of the oldest and most intricate in South Asia, characterized by the ancient bond of history, culture, tradition, and religion, are close, comprehensive, and multidimensional, and are more emphasized in political, social, cultural, religious, and economic contexts. To add a formal flavor to such historic relations, the two countries established diplomatic relations on June 17, 1947. A firm commitment to the principles of peaceful coexistence, sovereign equality, and understanding of mutual aspirations and sensibilities was the solid foundation on which our bilateral coexistence. relations further developed. The relationship between Nepal and India is essentially much more than the sum of the agreements between the two countries. The characteristic of relations between the countries is the repeated high-level visits of the leaders of the countries at various times and mutual communication. In addition, such visits helped to boost goodwill, trust, understanding, and cooperation between the countries and gave new impetus to the more mature and pragmatic strengthening of the ancient and multifaceted bilateral friendship and cooperation.

For various geopolitical reasons, Nepal is of great importance to India and to its security. Nepal shares a long and porous border with India that stretches over 1,750 kilometers. This proximity makes Nepal an important buffer state between India and China. Any instability or security threats in Nepal can directly affect India and the security environment. India and Nepal have deep historical, cultural and religious ties. People-to-people ties have traditionally been strong and both countries have a history of cooperation. Maintaining stability in Nepal is essential to maintain these ties and prevent tensions from spilling over into India. Nepal offers India strategic depth in the northern region. In times of conflict or geopolitical tensions, a friendly and stable neighbor like Nepal can be vital to India's security. Several large rivers originating in Nepal flow into India and are crucial sources of water. Any changes in water flow or

infrastructure development in Nepal could significantly affect India's water security, agriculture and overall economic development. Historically, Nepal has faced internal conflicts and rebellions. A resurgence of such activities could spread to parts of India, especially those with ethnic and cultural ties to Nepal. Nepal shares a border with China and its strategic location makes it a major player in the wider geopolitics of the region. China has increased its influence in Nepal through financial investments, infrastructure projects and diplomatic efforts. India must navigate this dynamic carefully to ensure that its security interests are not compromised. Nepal is an important trading partner for India. Any disturbance in the economic relations between countries can affect the economic stability of the region. It is in India's interest to maintain a stable and cooperative relationship with Nepal for mutual economic benefit. Political or security instability in Nepal could lead to the movement of refugees across the border into India, creating humanitarian problems and potentially depleting local resources. In conclusion, the geopolitical importance of Nepal to India and its security cannot be overestimated. Ensuring stability, promoting diplomatic relations and dealing with potential sources of tension are important aspects of the foreign policy of India and Nepal to protect their security interests in the region.

India and Nepal share deep-rooted cultural and people-to-people ties that significantly contribute to mutual security. These ties have historical, social, and economic dimensions, fostering a sense of interconnectedness between the two nations. India and Nepal have deep cultural and people-to-people ties that contribute significantly to mutual security. These ties have historical, social and economic dimensions that contribute to the bond between the two nations. India and Nepal share a common cultural and historical heritage with deep ties spanning centuries. Hinduism, Buddhism and other shared cultural practices promote a sense of shared identity. Both countries have many religious places of great importance for Hindus and Buddhists. Pilgrimages and religious tourism promote cultural exchange and people-to-people connections. An open border between India and Nepal created by the India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship allows people to move freely across the border without visas. It facilitated cross-border trade, cultural exchange and family ties, fostering a strong bond between the two countries. The free movement of goods and services fosters economic interdependence, which can have a stabilizing effect on the region. Nepalis often look for work in India and their remittances to Nepal play a vital role in the country and economy. Keeping in mind the common security concerns, India and Nepal have cooperated in the fight against terrorism. Information exchange and joint initiatives were taken to solve common security problems. The countries are linked by historic military ties, and joint military exercises strengthen their security cooperation. Both countries are prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods. Cooperation in the field of disaster prevention and management promotes the well-being and security of the people of the region. Academic exchanges and scholarships foster a deeper understanding of the people of India and Nepal. Training links promote the development of human resources and promote mutual understanding. Various cultural events, festivals and exchange programs strengthen the bonds between people and promote the feeling and understanding of common values. Cultural and people-to-people relations between India and Nepal form a strong foundation for mutual security. Historical, economic and social ties promote stability and cooperation, and continued efforts to strengthen these ties will further strengthen the overall security of the region.

Nepal is sandwiched between two powerful nations. As in the 18th century, King Prithvi Narayan Shah said, "Yam between two boulders," in which India and China are two boulders, and now the third boulder is the U.S. China doesn't want the U.S. to enter Nepal. The U.S. wants to restrict China, seeing it as a

threat to democracy and development in Nepal. India wants to restrict China to ensure its age-old cultural, religious, social, economic and political relations further strengthen in Himalayan Kingdom.

2. History of India Nepal Relations:

The foundation of India-Nepal relations was laid in the 1950 India-Nepal Treaty of Friendship (India-Nepal Treaty of Friendship). In the 1950s, the rulers of the Rana Kingdom of Nepal welcomed close relations with newly independent India, fearing the overthrow of Chinese-backed communists. autocratic power after the success of the Chinese Communist Revolution and the establishment of the CCP government on 1 October 1949. However, Rana power in Nepal collapsed within three months of the signing of the 1950 Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty and was replaced by the 1950 Indo-Nepal Peace and Friendship Treaty. the only professional. -Modern Indian Party - Nepali Congress. As the number of Indians living and working in Nepal's Terai region grew and Indian involvement in Nepali politics deepened in the 1960s and beyond, so did Nepal's discomfort. with the special relationship. [citation needed] India's influence over Nepal grew in the 1950s. The Nepalese Citizenship Act of 1952 gave Indians the right to immigrate to Nepal and obtain Nepalese citizenship without difficulty, causing outrage in Nepal. This practice remained in place until 1962, when several restrictive clauses were added to the constitution of Nepal. In addition, an Indian military mission was established in Nepal in 1952, consisting of a major general and 20 other Indian army personnel, which was later expanded to a total of 197. At the same time, the royal family of Nepal began to emerge and dissatisfaction with India and its growing influence began to appear As a result, Nepal became China's counterweight to India. A commercial agreement between the two countries was ratified in October 1950 in which India recognized the rights of Nepal to import and export goods through Indian territories and ports. According to the agreement, customs duties cannot be levied on goods transported through India. After the Sino-Indian border war of 1962, relations between Nepal and India thawed significantly. India suspended its support to India-based Nepalese opposition forces in protest against the dissolution of King Mahendra's democratic government. The defeat of Indian troops in the border war with China in 1962 gave Nepal much-needed breathing space and Nepal made several concessions in trade with India. Instead, in a secret agreement in 1965 similar to the one suspended in 1963, India obtained a monopoly on arms sales to Nepal. Tensions rose in the mid-1970s when Nepal demanded significant changes in trade and transit agreements and publicly condemned India's 1975 annexation of Sikkim and In 1975, after the annexation of the immediate neighbor of Nepal, king Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Devi, the Kingdom of Sikkim made Nepal internationally recognized as a zone of peace and tranquility; where military competition would be prohibited. Nepal's proposal received immediate support from Pakistan and China, but not from India. In 1978, India agreed to separate trade and transit agreements, satisfying Nepal's long-standing demand. But much to the chagrin of the Royal Palace of Nepal and in continued violation of the 1950s PFT, India continuously allowed Nepali opposition parties to use Indian soil to agitate against the Nepalese government and refused to accept Nepal as a peace zone. quote] In 1988, when the two agreements were renewed, Nepal refused to comply with India's wishes for a single trade and transit agreement, arguing that it violated the principle of free trade. After that, both India and Nepal took a tough stance, causing a major crisis in India-Nepal relations. Nepal's leaders reaffirmed their position that transit privileges are a fundamental and permanent right of a borderless country under the UN Charter. and thus, India's demand for a single treaty could not be accepted. In 1989, Nepal delinked its rupee from the Indian rupee, which until then was freely circulating in Nepal. This further strained the relationship between the two countries.

The special security relationship between New Delhi and Kathmandu was re-established in June 1990 by Nepalese Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Indian Prime Minister V.P. at the meeting. Singh as India ended the 13-month economic blockade of Nepal. During the visit of Nepalese Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala to India in December 1991, the countries signed new separate trade and transit agreements and other economic agreements aimed at bringing more economic benefits to Nepal. In June 1990, a joint communique was issued between Kathmandu and New Delhi. is granted until a comprehensive agreement covering all aspects of bilateral relations, restoration of trade relations, reopening of transit routes for Nepalese imports and formalization of mutual respect and security concerns. In 2005, when King Gyanendra took power, Nepal's relations with India worsened. But even after the restoration of democracy in 2008, Nepali Prime Minister Prachanda visited India only after visiting China in September 2008, breaking a long-standing tradition of Nepali prime ministers making India their first port of call. While in India, he spoke of a new dawn in the countries' bilateral relations. In 2008, Indo-Nepal relations received a boost with an agreement to resume water negotiations after a 4-year hiatus. In 2010, India extended its credit line of 50 million US dollars and 80,000 tons of food grains. In addition, a three-tier mechanism will be built at ministerial, secretarial and technical levels to promote cross-party discussions on water resource development. In 2014, the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu started an open-door service where complaints are taken into consideration. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Nepal in August 2014, the first official visit by an Indian Prime Minister in 17 years. During his visit, the Indian government agreed to provide \$1 billion soft credit to Nepal for various development purposes and under the HIT formula, but he insisted that Indian migrants in Nepal are not a threat to Nepal's sovereignty and hence the open border between Nepal and India. should be abolished. a bridge and not a barrier. On November 25, 2014, Nepal and India signed an agreement under which India will build a 900 MW hydroelectric power plant within a year. In 2015, Nepal promulgated its new Constitution but the Madhesis, some Janajatis and some Tharus, felt they were marginalized and being left out in the new constitution. These groups, the Madhesis in particular, then organized small scale protests and blockaded a portion of border India-Nepal border near Biratnagar area in September 2015, shortly after the devastating earthquake which had mainly affected people of Hilly regions of Nepal. A two-day international Buddhist conference in Kathmandu held on 19–20 May 2016, celebrating Vesak and the 2560th anniversary of Buddha's birth, was also used to promote Buddha's birthplace in what is now Nepal. The decision of the Ministry of Culture of Nepal to change the subject to Conservation and Development of the Buddhist Heritage of Nepal; with the sub-theme and; Lumbini - the birthplace of Buddha as "Lumbini - the source of Buddhism; came under fire from India, which later boycotted the conference because of it and China's alleged financial interference. In 2018, Oli visited India and held discussions with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, focusing on enhancing bilateral ties and economic collaboration. One of the significant developments during Oli's tenure was the border dispute that intensified in late 2019 when Nepal published a new political map, incorporating territories claimed by India, such as Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh, and Kalapani. This move sparked considerable controversy and strained diplomatic ties, highlighting nationalistic sentiments in Nepal. Despite these tensions, diplomatic engagement continued. India remained a vital development partner, supporting various infrastructure projects in Nepal, including roads and hydroelectric initiatives, as well as the upgrade of the Kathmandu-India railway. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 brought another dimension to the relationship. As India faced its own health crisis, it nevertheless supplied medical aid, vaccines, and other forms of assistance to Nepal, which helped maintain a degree of goodwill amidst earlier tensions.

3. Economic Relations:

Economic relations between India and Nepal have long historical roots. The Treaty of Peace and Friendship signed between India and Nepal in 1950 and the Agreement on Trade and Transition signed in 1960 and other bilateral agreements played an important role in promoting trade and institutionalizing a visible part of economic relations. Driven by mutual interests, India signed peace and trade agreements with Nepal, giving Nepal landlocked access to global markets for its exports. Both countries are associated with regional entities such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). These organizations actively promote economic integration and cooperation in South Asia and the wider regional context. Nepal has repeatedly asked for Chinese grants in lieu of soft loans instead of buying China's BRIs, in which loans are given at a higher interest rate. Nepal is justifiably worried about additional loans under the BRI projects since it already has a significant trade deficit with China.

3.1 Trade and Investment:

Indian companies are among the largest investors in Nepal, representing 33.5% of the total foreign direct investment (FDI) stock, valued at nearly USD 670 million. Nepal has become India's 17th largest export destination, up from the 28th position in 2014. India accounts for 64.1% of Nepal's total trade, amounting to approximately USD 8.85 billion (Indian FY 22-23). This includes USD 8.015 billion in exports from India to Nepal and USD 839.62 million in exports from Nepal to India.

India is the primary destination for Nepal's exports, receiving 67.9% of the total, with Nepal primarily exporting edible oil, coffee, tea, and jute. The main imports from India include petroleum products, iron and steel, cereals, vehicles and parts, and machinery components. There are around 150 Indian ventures operating in Nepal, involved in sectors such as manufacturing, services (including banking, insurance, dry ports, education, and telecommunications), power, and tourism.

Both countries have an open border and trade is governed by a bilateral trade agreement. The Nepal-India Transit Agreement (1999), the Trade Agreement (2009), the Cooperation Agreement to Combat Illegal Trade (2009) and the Railway Services Agreement (2004) together lay the foundation for a bilateral trade and transit regulatory framework. between two countries. According to the Trade Agreement (2009), products produced in Nepal have duty-free access to the Indian market on a non-reciprocal basis. The India-Nepal Cooperation Agreement to Combat Illegal Trade, signed in 2009, provides a legal framework to combat illegal trade. The India-Nepal Transit Agreement, which is renewed every seven years, provides port facilities for Nepal at Kolkata/Haldia and Visakhapatnam and specifies various transit routes between Kolkata and Visakhapatnam and the Indo-Nepal border. Indo-Nepal border has 27 entry and exit points for bilateral trade. The Railway Services Agreement 2004 defines the operational and administrative features of rail transport between India and Nepal. The link was initially established from Kolkata/Haldia port to Raxaul/Birgunj transit point in Nepal. In 2016, Visakhapatnam port was added as an additional point for transit traffic to Nepal, expanding the scope of rail traffic to the port. The Letter of Exchange (LoE) for the Railway Service Agreement (RSA) between Nepal and India was officially signed on July 9, 2021. This agreement opens up opportunities for all freight train operators to use India's extensive rail network to transport containers to and from Nepal. This includes facilitation of bilateral cargo movement between India and Nepal and acceptance of third country cargo from Indian ports to Nepal. Implementation of this arrangement should improve efficiency and cost competitiveness, ultimately benefiting Nepalese consumers. These agreements enable the smooth exchange of goods and services between two countries. Nepal mainly exports goods such as carpets, textiles, tea and handicrafts to India,

while it imports a wide range of products such as petroleum products, machinery, electronics, pharmaceuticals and agricultural products. Nepal's most important trading partner is India, and an open border between the two countries facilitates smooth trade.

3.2 Infrastructure and Connectivity:

In the past 15 years, the developmental partnership has made significant progress, leading to various connectivity projects that enhance Nepal's access to transport and trade routes. Notable projects include the Jayanagar-Bijalpura-Bardibas rail link, which is Nepal's first broad gauge line, as well as the Jogbani-Biratnagar and Raxaul-Kathmandu rail links. Key road initiatives include the Hulaki/Terai Road and Integrated Check Posts at Birgunj (the first of its kind in Nepal), Biratnagar, Nepalgunj, and Bhairahawa. The first cross-border broad gauge passenger train service between Jayanagar in Nepal and Kurtha in India was inaugurated during former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's visit to India from April 1-3, 2022, while the inaugural freight train service was launched during Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda's visit from May 31 to June 3, 2023.

To improve connectivity in the far western region, the construction of a motorable bridge in Dhachula began in October 2022, supported by grants. Another significant project under Indian grant assistance is the construction of the National Police Academy of Nepal. To ensure a steady supply of fuel from India to Nepal, the first cross-border petroleum pipeline in South Asia, linking Motihari in India to Amlekhgunj in Nepal, was completed in 2019. This pipeline quickly proved beneficial, saving Nepal approximately Rs 9 crores monthly and setting a record by delivering 100 million liters of diesel in a single month in December 2020.

The Government of India is also collaborating with the Government of Nepal on grassroots initiatives through the High Impact Community Development Project (HICDP), focusing on building hospitals, schools, colleges, and improving access to drinking water, sanitation, drainage, rural electrification, hydropower, and river training works to enhance local quality of life. As of January 2024, the funding cap for each project has increased to Nrs 20 crores. Since 2003, over 551 projects have been completed by the Government of India at a total cost of Nrs 1249 crores. Since 1994, the Government of India has provided 1009 ambulances and 300 school buses across various regions of Nepal to support healthcare and education, in addition to offering election-related vehicle assistance. Beyond grant support, India has also extended Lines of Credit totaling USD 1.65 billion for infrastructure development, including post-earthquake reconstruction projects, primarily focusing on roads and transmission lines.

3.3 Power

One of the key areas of mutual benefit in India-Nepal relations is cooperation in the power sector. The Joint Vision Statement on Power Sector Cooperation, issued on April 2, 2022, during the Nepalese Prime Minister's visit to India, outlines a detailed roadmap for collaboration. The main components include the joint development of power generation projects in Nepal, the establishment of cross-border transmission infrastructure, bi-directional power trade, coordinated national grid operations, and institutional collaboration to share the latest technology and operational expertise. Notably, Nepal has already seen significant benefits, reportedly earning around NPR 10-15 crores per day from power exports to India. In the power sector, landmark agreements were finalized for long-term power trade and new hydropower projects, including the 480 MW Phukot Karnali and 669 MW Lower Arun projects, along with positive momentum on trilateral power transactions involving India, Nepal, and Bangladesh. Overall, India and Nepal have established over 40 bilateral institutional mechanisms to cover the full spectrum of their relationship. Hydropower is an important area of economic cooperation. Indian companies have been

involved in the development of hydropower projects in Nepal with the aim of tapping into its vast hydropower potential and meeting its energy needs. India, Nepal, and Bangladesh are working on a tripartite power trade deal under which Nepal will supply up to 500 megawatts (MW) of hydropower to Bangladesh using India's transmission line, a move that can further boost cross-border electricity trading in South Asia. Nepal and India inked an agreement, setting the target to reach 10,000 megawatts of electricity exported to India in the coming decade.

4. Political Dynamics:

4.1 Diplomatic Engagements:

There are regular high-level visits and interactions between India and Nepal. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi visited Nepal twice in 2014: on August 3–4 with a bilateral visit and on November 25–27 at the SAARC Summit. The Prime Minister of Nepal, K.P. Sharma Oli, was on a state visit to India on February 19–24, 2016. Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister, Bimalendra Nidhi, visited India on August 18–22, 2016 as a special envoy of the Prime Minister. Nepali Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' visited India twice in 2016: from 3 to 6 p.m. in September during the state visit and from October 15–17 to attend the first BRICS-BIMSTEC Leaders' Summit in Goa. President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, was on a state visit to Nepal on November 2–4, 2016. It was the first state visit of an Indian president to Nepal after a gap of 18 years. The President of Nepal, Bidya Devi Bhandari, was on a state visit to India on April 17–21, 2017. The Prime Minister of Nepal, Sher Bahadur Deuba, was on a state visit to India on August 23–27, 2017. The Prime Minister of Nepal, K.P. Sharma, was on a state visit to India on April 6–8, 2018. The Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, was on a state visit to Nepal on May 11–12. Prime Minister Modi visited on 30-31 August 2018 also at the 4 BIMSTEC Summit in Kathmandu, Nepal. This was his fourth visit to Nepal since 2014. The Prime Minister of Nepal, K.P. Sharma Oli, visited India on May 30-31, 2019 to attend the inauguration ceremony of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and the Union Council of Ministers. India and Nepal have several bilateral institutional dialogue mechanisms, including the India-Nepal Joint Committee chaired by the Indian Foreign Minister and the Nepalese Foreign Minister. The fifth meeting of the commission took place on August 21–22, 2019 in Kathmandu. Exchange of parliamentarians: a 13-member delegation of parliamentarians and officials of the Development Committee of the Nepalese parliament stayed from August 16. until July 2016 during a study trip in India. Another delegation from the Nepal Parliament visited India from August 20–31, 2016. At the level of Head of State, the Hon'ble President of India made a state visit to Nepal in November 2016, marking the first visit by an Indian President in 18 years. Subsequently, then President of Nepal, Rt Hon'ble Mrs. Bidya Devi Bhandari, visited India in April 2017. A 13-member delegation from the International Relations and Working Committee of the Nepal Legislative Assembly visited New Delhi and Gujarat on a goodwill study visit from August 5–12, 2017. In May 2019, the Federal Parliament of Nepal formed the Nepal-India Parliamentary Friendship Group, consisting of nine members from the House of Representatives (Lower House) and the National Assembly (Upper House) of the Federal Parliament of Nepal.

Since May 2014, there have been 17 exchanges at the Head of State or Head of Government level. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has visited Nepal five times since then, while Nepalese Prime Ministers have visited India ten times. The most recent visit by PM Modi was to Lumbini on May 16, 2022, for Buddha Purnima. PM Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' visited India for an official trip from May 31 to June 3,

2023, and was invited by PM Modi to attend the swearing-in ceremony in New Delhi on June 9-10, 2024. They also had a congratulatory phone call regarding PM Modi's re-election on June 5, 2024.

At the ministerial level, the Joint Commission, co-chaired by the External Affairs Minister (EAM), has met five times since May 2014, with the most recent meeting occurring on January 4-5, 2024, in Kathmandu. Foreign Ministers from both countries frequently meet at various forums, including EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar's meetings with FM Mr. NP Saud in Dhaka on May 12, 2023, and in Bangkok on July 17, 2023, during the Indian Ocean Conference and the BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers meeting, respectively. FM Mr. NP Saud also attended the Raisina Dialogue in India and met EAM on February 23, 2024. Additionally, FM Mr. Narayan Kaji Shrestha had a congratulatory call with EAM Dr. Jaishankar on June 12, 2024, following his reappointment.

4.2 Security Cooperation:

India and Nepal have extensive defense cooperation. India has assisted the Nepal Army (NA) in its modernization with equipment and training. Disaster relief, joint military exercises, adventure activities, and bilateral visits are also aspects of India-Nepal defense cooperation. Some of the defense forces of the Nepalese army undergo training in various educational institutions of the Indian army. "Joint Indo-Nepal battalion exercise SURYA KIRAN" will be held alternately in India and Nepal. The 14th Surya Kiran exercise was held on December 3–16, 2019 in Saljhand, Nepal. Since 1950, India and Nepal have transferred the rank of general to the army chiefs of each other as a recognition of the harmonious relationship between the two armies. Gorkha regiments of the Indian Army are raised partly through recruitment from the hilly regions of Nepal. Around 32,000 Gorkha soldiers from Nepal are currently serving in the Indian Army. In addition to the Military Pension Branch in Kathmandu, there are two pension disbursement offices in Pokhara and Dharan and 22 District Military Boards in Nepal, all under the Defense Forces of the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu, which administer pension payments and social welfare. retraining, rehabilitation, and relief programs for ex-Gorkha soldiers and their families. India has taken the lead in helping the Nepal Army (NA) to modernize it by providing equipment and training. More than 180 seats are offered for training of NA personnel every year in various educational institutions of the Indian Army. The Chief of Army Staff of the Indian Army receives the rank of General of the Nepalese Army and the mutual honor is given to the Chief of the Nepalese Army. India has always been proud to have Nepalis as soldiers in its forces and has done everything possible to ensure that they are looked after and cared for in their twilight years. Currently more than 1.23 million ex-soldiers live in Nepal. 1100 million in pensions paid to Indian ex-servicemen in Nepal in 2010-2011.

5. Cultural Exchanges:

India and Nepal share a deep cultural connection, strengthened by various initiatives from the Government of India aimed at enhancing people-to-people interactions in art, culture, academia, and media. These initiatives include cultural programs, symposia, and events organized in collaboration with local bodies in Nepal, as well as conferences and seminars in Hindi and Sanskrit. In 2023, the 75th anniversary of "Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav" was celebrated in Nepal through a series of events featuring music, dance, a development partnership conclave, and a startup event.

Cultural ties between Nepal and India have many aspects. Religion is perhaps the most important factor and plays a dominant role in shaping cultural relations between the two countries. This is expressed in the large number of people from both countries who visit each other's countries on pilgrimage. Thousands of Nepali nationals visit pilgrimage sites in India every year. Char Dham Yatra (visiting the four dhaams in

India, i.e. Badrinath/Kedarnath in Uttarakhand, Jagannath (Puri) in Orissa, Rameshwaram in Tamil Nadu and Dwarka in Gujrat) is a lifelong aspiration for almost all Hindus. There are many other places in India that are considered sacred by the Nepalese. These include Haridwar, Rishikesh, Varanasi, Gaya, Vaishnodevi and many others. Similarly, there are several religious places in Nepal which are considered very sacred and important and are mandatory religious places for Indian citizens. Such places include Pashupatinath in Kathmandu, Lumbini (Birthplace of Buddha) in Rupandeh, Ram-Janak Temple in Janakpur (Birthplace of Janak and Sita) and many others. Since the peoples of both countries share a common religious belief and philosophy and respect and worship the same gods and incarnations, their cultural ties are truly strong and inseparable. Born in Nepal, Lord Buddha left his mark not only in South Asia, but all over the world. Sita, the daughter of Nepal, who was married to Ram, the crown prince of Ayodhya, India, took a special place in the hearts of Hindus around the world. The contribution of Indian philosophers and saints need not be discussed further.

Another part of cultural relations between Nepal and India is cinema and music. Indian films are popular in Nepal; and so is Indian music. Similarly, Nepali cinema and music are popular in India, especially in areas where people of Nepali origin are concentrated, mostly in North and North East India. Language is another part of the cultural cohesion between Nepal and India. The peoples of both countries share many common languages. Such common languages include Nepali, Maitilian, Bhojpuri, Hindi, Avadan etc. Sanskrit is the root of many of these languages and is considered the language of gods and saints. Both Nepal and India use the Devnagari script to write Nepali, Hindi and many other common languages. Many religious texts are written in this script, including the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas, the Tripitaka. The MoUs/Agreements are signed by: (i) Sahitya Kala Akademi (India) and Nepali Academy, (ii) Doordarshan (India) and Nepali TV, (iii) Press Council of India and Nepali Press Council, (iv) Lalit Kala Akademi (India) and Nepal Academy of Fine Arts, (v) Government of Indonesia and Government of Nepal for cooperation in youth issues, (vi) Sangeet Natak Akademi (India) and Nepal Academy of Music and Drama and (vii) Government of Indonesia and Nepal and the twin cities of Kathmandu-Varanasi, Lumbini-Bodhgaya and Janakpur-Ayodh. Swami Vivekananda Center for Indian Culture was established in Kathmandu in August 2007 to show the best of Indian culture. The center has generated considerable goodwill through various cultural events in the past. The Nepal-Bharat Library was established in 1951 in Kathmandu. It is considered to be the first foreign library in Nepal. It aims to promote and strengthen cultural relations and information exchange between India and Nepal. B.P. The Koirala India-Nepal Foundation was established in 1991 under a Memorandum of Understanding between the Governments of India and Nepal. The Foundation aims to promote educational, cultural, scientific and technical cooperation between India and Nepal and to promote mutual understanding and cooperation through sharing of knowledge and professional talents in academic pursuits and technical specialization.

India's development partnership with Nepal includes a strong focus on human resource cooperation. The Government of India offers over 1,500 scholarships each year for studies in both India and Nepal, covering a wide range of fields such as medicine, engineering, agriculture, business, nursing, Ayurveda and other traditional medicine, as well as music and dance. Since 2001, approximately 38,000 Nepali nationals have benefited from these scholarships. For government officials and professionals, Nepal has been a key partner under the Indian Technical & Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program, which began in 1964. ITEC has trained around 200,000 professionals, including both defense and civilian personnel, across more than 160 countries. Since 2007, over 2,000 professionals, bureaucrats, and defense personnel from Nepal have participated in this capacity-building initiative. In the past two years alone, around 200 doctors, 20 judicial

professionals, 50 officials from the Office of the Attorney General, and 180 police officials from Nepal have benefitted from the ITEC program.

6. Emergency or Humanitarian Assistance:

India has long been a reliable partner for Nepal during emergencies and crises. Nepali nationals in conflict zones have been evacuated alongside Indian citizens through government-led efforts like ‘Operation Ajay’ and ‘Operation Ganga.’ India was also the first responder to the devastating 7.8 magnitude earthquake that struck Nepal on April 25, 2015, followed by a powerful aftershock of 7.4 magnitude on May 12, 2015. The Government of India quickly dispatched National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) teams and special aircraft loaded with rescue and relief materials. Assistance arrived within six hours and included 16 NDRF teams and 39 Indian Air Force sorties, delivering 571 tons of relief supplies such as rescue equipment, medical supplies, food, water, tents, blankets, and tarpaulin. During the International Conference on Nepal’s Reconstruction in Kathmandu on June 25, 2015, the Government of India announced a reconstruction package of USD 1 billion, which included USD 250 million in grants and USD 750 million in concessional Lines of Credit. By November 2021, the reconstruction of 50,000 houses was completed, and 44 schools and 18 health facilities were handed over to the Nepali government, with additional projects in various stages of completion.

Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, India worked to keep trade supply lines open. Nepal was one of the first countries to receive the ‘Made in India’ COVID-19 vaccine on January 21, 2021, facilitating the nationwide vaccination drive. India also provided 23 tons of essential medicines early in the pandemic. Amid a global oxygen shortage during the peak of the second wave, India sent a 960 LPM oxygen plant to the BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences in Dharan, which played a crucial role in saving lives. Additionally, India supplied 100,000 doses of vaccines and medical equipment, including ventilators, ambulances, ICU beds, PPE kits, and PCR test kits, to the Nepali Army.

After the earthquake on November 3, 2023, centered in Jajarkot and West Rukum in Karnali province, India was the first international responder, providing emergency relief materials within 48 hours. To date, India has delivered five tranches of relief supplies to Nepal, including 200 prefabricated houses, tents, tarpaulin sheets, sleeping blankets, vital medicines, and medical support equipment. Furthermore, during the visit of the External Affairs Minister in January 2024, a financial assistance package of approximately NPR 1,000 crores was announced to support reconstruction efforts following the Jajarkot earthquake, with a significant portion allocated as grants.

7. Challenges:

Firstly, Madhesi’s segment of People lives in the course of the southern a part of the Terai location and has tons nearer ties with India. The political rights of Madhesi’s segment of humans had been diluted of their new Constitution promulgated in 2015 which brought about wider protests and blockade in Nepal brought about the blockading of oil and different critical supplies. Nepal authorities accused India of helping Madhesi’s and said India is meddling withinside the inner subjects of Nepal. Nepal raised the problem in a “alternate blockade” on the UN in October 2015. But Madhesi’s protest became a spontaneous motion and it had not anything to do with India. One of the most scholars, Professor S.D. Muni factors out predominant demanding situations with the Nepal authorities as India’s fears that a constitution drafted beneath assertive Maoist management might not be well matched with the democratic profile of Nepal. India’s additionally fears that the Maoists had been willing to and able to converting

Nepal's home energy equations. The current choice of Nepal Prime Minister dissolving the decrease residence has created a brand-new political disaster altogether.

Secondly, China's closeness with Nepal and the Influence of China in India-Nepal members of the family is a motive of concern. Nepal is a landlocked country that has relied tons on India for predominant supplies, transit and transport. India-Nepal Blockade modified the belief completely. The Nepal earthquake in 2015 became the best time for China to make large investments in infrastructure like Tibet Railway, many dual carriageway projects, get entry to Chinese ports etc. By the stop of 2016, China have become the predominant help issuer of Nepal. Hydrel co-operation, Fuel and Humanitarian help from China has elevated many folds. For example, China pledged to offer four million liters of gasoline and deliberate to assemble 750 MW West-Seti Dam project. Nepal additionally helps China's Belt and Road Initiative and the China-Nepal members of the family up to now is solid to a few extents.

Thirdly, the boundary disputes among India-Nepal is a big challenge for both countries. About 1850 km boundary line among India-Nepal faces predominant boundary disputes. Kalapani is the disputed territory withinside the Uttarakhand country of India. The British authorities has set the beginning of River Kali because the western border of Nepal. But the beginning of the river Kali is disputed among India-Nepal. While India makes use of the more recent British survey, Nepal desires the vicinity to be demarcated primarily based totally at the older British survey. New map of Nepal became notified in June 2020 with Kalapani in Nepal.

Susta is some other disputed territory placed withinside the Terai areas of India. (Source)Fourthly, the demanding situations regarding the open border. The border is notoriously porous. Being furnished unique reputation to Nepal, India's inner safety confronted many demanding situations together with. The Pakistani militants the use of Nepalese territory as a hideout and base for infiltration into India. The Ministry of Home Affairs in its Annual Report 1999-2000 highlighted this Pakistani involvement in Nepal and its safety implications in India. The Nepalese Maoists have prolonged assist and cooperation to the Indian Maoists and carving out a Compact Revolutionary Zone, a 'Revolutionary Corridor' spreading from Nepal through Bihar and as much as Andhra Pradesh. Apart from those the open borders have additionally created demanding situations together with pumping faux Indian foreign money notes, human trafficking in particular younger ladies and women, livestock smuggling, etc.

8. Way Forward:

- A focused approach is needed not only for India-Nepal relations, but also for other countries in the region, focusing more on neighborhood policy. India should leverage strategic influence, faster and more efficient implementation of infrastructure and development projects in Nepal.
- India can focus on "relief diplomacy" to reduce the confidence deficit and also needs to continue post-earthquake reconstruction. Further deepening of cooperation in areas such as trade, water resources, energy cooperation, etc.
- According to Chinese influence, experts believe that Nepal's nearest ports will always remain in India and the Ganges plain will remain its biggest market.
- The government should establish a permanent mechanism for flood mitigation in the Indian and Nepalese regions.
- The government of Nepal must abandon narrow terms and shift its focus to broadening the demands of all sections of society and incorporate them into the constitution. Nepal also needs to stop the rhetoric of regional nationalism and pull the China card whenever they negotiate with India.

- India should stop looking at Nepal only through the prism of security and bilateral relations only as a transaction and part of a zero-sum game with China.
- India should hold diplomatic talks to resolve the border dispute with Nepal under the auspices of international law on transboundary water disputes. In this case, the settlement of the border dispute between India and Bangladesh should be a model.
- India should follow the policy of staying out of Nepal's internal affairs while India should guide the country towards a more inclusive democracy in the spirit of friendship.

9. Conclusion:

The dynamic relationship between India and Nepal has witnessed a complex interplay of continuity and change over the years. The historical, cultural, and geographical ties that bind the two nations have remained constant, fostering a deep-rooted connection. However, the bilateral relationship has also navigated through periods of strain and transformation, shaped by evolving geopolitical realities and domestic considerations.

While historical legacies and people-to-people ties continue to form the bedrock of India-Nepal relations, the two nations have demonstrated adaptability in addressing contemporary challenges and seizing opportunities for collaboration. The evolving geopolitical landscape, regional dynamics, and economic imperatives have influenced the trajectory of the relationship, ushering in periods of both cooperation and divergence.

It is imperative for both India and Nepal to recognize the importance of open communication, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to addressing concerns for sustained cooperation. Embracing the spirit of diplomacy and acknowledging each other's sovereignty will contribute to fostering a robust and forward-looking partnership. The relationship between India and Nepal, characterized by its intricate blend of continuity and change, is a testament to the resilience and potential for growth in South Asian diplomatic ties. As both nations continue to navigate the complexities of the international arena, the ability to balance tradition with adaptation will be crucial in building a durable and mutually beneficial alliance.

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