

Maintaining Good Relations with Immediate Neighbors

- *Kapil P. Lohani*

Nepal's immediate neighbors India and China have been stunning the world with their outstanding advancement through economic development. Both these neighbors are achieving a remarkable economic growth and have already gained the status of one of the emerging economic powers. China has become the second largest economy in the world. Until the 1970s, the world economists were of the opinion that due to the huge and ever increasing population of these two neighboring countries, they would never be able to reach the level of prosperity that the people of the western world are enjoying, and all they could be able to do will be to provide only basic amenities to their people. However, with the huge economic scale of production, scientific and technological innovations, industrialization, commercialization of agriculture and creation of market through various innovative techniques, and the use of appropriate technology in core areas, and, of course, with massive educational drive along with their hard work, both these countries have proved that they are capable to provide all sorts of happiness to their people and compete with the rest of the world.

Being a land-locked country, Nepal shares border in three sides with India and to the north with China. Founder of modern Nepal King Prithivi Narayan Shah, had regarded Nepal as a yam between two big stones, some 240 years ago. This statement was made not only because Nepal was situated between the two big nations, but the word "yam" might have been used due to the richness Nepal was granted by mother-nature. Though the cultural, religious and political relations with both the neighboring countries were rightly maintained by the rulers of respective small principalities before Nepal's unification, all the later rulers of unified Nepal also did their best to maintain good relations and please both these neighbors.

People living in the southern parts of Nepal have very close cultural, religious, and linguistic similarities with India, whereas those living in the highlands bordering with Tibetan region of China have also equally similar type of life style. In fact,

though Nepal itself is a rich nation having diverse culture and natural wonders, it cannot remain isolated from any of these two immediate neighbors.

Way back from the British rule, there used to be continued tension in the border areas of India and Tibetan region of China, as many strategic places were claimed by both these countries, and still today such border disputes are prevailing. They even had a war in 1962 due to the heightening of these issues. However, a commendable thing to note about Nepal's diplomacy is that, though India and China fought a war physically and also had long been engaged in cold wars, Nepal never took side of any of them, nor these nations intended to use Nepalese territory during the entire war. Even during the British rule, Nepal never allowed the British India to use Nepali territory for any type of infiltration or action against Tibet.

Both India and China have been whole heartedly assisting Nepal in her economic development endeavor from the time Nepal opened herself to the world in 1950. Nepal and China officially established diplomatic relations in 1955. Both these countries' contribution mainly in the field of basic infrastructure such as transport, hydro-electricity, agriculture, industry, communication, health and education are highly remarkable. Right after the advent of democracy, India helped build a road from the terai plains to Nepal's capital and also assisted in the construction of airstrips in various important business centers of the country. Likewise, it helped build small hydro-electric plants and irrigation facilities, schools, colleges, hospitals and health posts and various industries in different places. India's role as a mediator to peacefully transfer the power to the people during the tripartite meeting of 1950 between the King, the Ranas and the democratic forces is worth a topic to be recorded with golden ink while writing the modern history of Nepal. On the other hand, China helped build major highways and urban roads, hospitals, industries, small hydro-electric plant, conference facilities, and the only pollution-free electric trolley bus service in South Asia, to mention few important ones. Both India and China's rescue and reconstruction related assistance during and after the massive earthquake of 2015 will always be remembered by the Nepalese people.

There have been frequent visits of heads of states and governments of both Nepal and the two giant neighbors. Most of the Presidents and Prime Ministers of India

have visited Nepal during their official tenure. Likewise, a number of high level dignitaries including President Jiang Zemin, Premier Zhou En Lai and Vice Premier Deng Xiao Ping visited Nepal, and recently President Xi Jinping also visited Nepal. Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi has visited Nepal a number of times. The recent visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to India and Nepal has added yet another milestone in strengthening mutual relations and for maintaining regional peace and stability. This also shows how do our immediate neighbors regard Nepal as one of their closest well-wishers and a small but very important nation of the Himalayas.

In today's world, the definition of development and modernism has drastically changed mainly due to the advancement of technology. Now there are prospects of exporting our hydropower to both the immediate neighbors and even beyond. As the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China is also rapidly developing, the need for energy is increasing there and it would be easier for China to import it from Nepal rather than supply it from the far-off main land. China's road, rail and air transport network has almost reached the areas bordering Nepal, and this has opened new avenues for the development of Nepal.

During the past three decades, the ever bitter relations between India and China have improved significantly and they have come up with compromising terms in many conflicting issues. This has gradually increased the volume of mutual trade between these two giant nations. If Nepal could become a major transit point between India and China's trade route, we would be largely benefitting. For this, Nepal should have a smooth network of highways and rail routes connecting China and India. In brief, the more the territories of both India and China bordering Nepal develop, the faster Nepal will also head towards prosperity.

Each year India and China spend billions of dollars in the security of their frontiers. But as Nepal is situated in between these two neighbors, they do not have to worry much in this 800 kilometer stretch and also do not have to deploy security personnel heavily. Since, Nepal is playing a role of a neutral country having cordial relations with both of these neighbors and as we have our own strong military and para-military forces, both India and China are saving huge amount of defense budget. As such, why should not Nepal request both these countries without any hesitation to allocate a good percentage of their annual

defense savings for Nepal's economic development? Since Nepal Army, Armed Police Force and Nepal Police are playing a vital role in maintaining law and order, controlling all sorts of illegal activities targeted towards our two immediate neighbors, providing security in the border areas, and working tirelessly in the field of managing disaster and working hard in times of natural calamities, we should also seek additional assistance from both the neighbors to help modernize and develop the capacity of our security agencies.

In return, we should always be committed that Nepal will never allow anybody to gather in our soil to hatch conspiracy, perform terrorist or criminal activities or involve in any other forms of acts directed against our neighbors. In today's modern era, Nepal can also play a role of mediator to help improve the relations between India and China, besides giving firm support to the views and stands of our immediate neighbors in various international forums.

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