



India-Nepal Joint Commission Meet

Why in News

Recently, the **6th India-Nepal Joint Commission** meeting was held where in Nepal raised the [Kalapani boundary dispute](#) with India. The two sides also **discussed cooperation in a range of areas**, including power, oil and gas, water resources, capacity building and tourism among others.

- India distanced itself from discussing the matter at the Joint Commission level as there is a **dedicated Foreign Secretary-level mechanism to discuss boundary disputes**.

Key Points

- Nepal's requirement for vaccines to fight the [Covid-19](#) pandemic was discussed as it has approved **Serum Institute of India's (SII) Covishield vaccine**.
- Both the delegations reviewed the development partnership and discussed the benefit of the **Integrated Check Posts (ICP) at Birgunj and Biratnagar** (Nepal). The Posts have helped in seamless movement of people and trade between the two countries.
 - Third and Fourth ICP at Nepalgunj and Bhairahawa respectively to be started.
- India to build **two cultural heritage projects in Nepal** on the **'Pashupatinath Riverfront Development'** and the **'Bhandarkhal Garden Restoration in Patan Durbar'** through grant assistance.
- Nepal's Foreign Minister also delivered a speech in **Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA)**.
 - The Indian Council of World Affairs was established in **1943 as a think tank**. It is devoted exclusively for the **study of international relations and foreign affairs**. The **Vice President of India** is the **ex-officio President of ICWA**.

India - Nepal Relations

- **Historical Ties:**
 - Nepal is an important neighbour of India and occupies special significance in its foreign policy because of the **geographic, historical, cultural and economic linkages/ties that span centuries**.
 - India and Nepal share similar ties in terms of **Hinduism and Buddhism** with Buddha's birthplace Lumbini located in present day Nepal.
 - The two countries not only share an open border and unhindered movement of people, but they also have **close bonds through marriages and familial ties, popularly known as Roti-Beti ka Rishta**.
 - The India-Nepal [Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950](#) forms the bedrock of the special relations that exist between India and Nepal.
 - Importance for India can be studied from two different angles: a) **their strategic importance for India's national security**; and b) **their place in India's role perception in international politics**.
 - Rivers originating in Nepal feed the **perennial river systems** of India in terms of ecology and **hydropower potential**.

▪ Trade and Economy:

- India is Nepal's **largest trade partner** and the **largest source of foreign investments**, besides providing transit for almost the entire third country trade of Nepal.

▪ Connectivity:

- Nepal being a landlocked country, it is surrounded by India from three sides and one side is open towards Tibet which has very **limited vehicular access**.
- India-Nepal has undertaken various **connectivity programs** to enhance people-to-people linkages and promote economic growth and development.
 - MOUs have been signed between both the governments for laying electric **rail track linking Kathmandu with Raxaul** in India.
 - India is looking to develop the **inland waterways** for the movement of cargo, within the framework of trade and transit arrangements, providing additional access to sea for Nepal calling it linking **Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest) with Sagar (Indian Ocean)**.

▪ Defence Cooperation

- Bilateral defence cooperation includes assistance to Nepalese Army in its modernization through provision of equipment and training.
- The **Gorkha Regiments** of the Indian Army are raised partly by recruitment from hill districts of Nepal.
- India from 2011, every year undertakes joint military exercise with Nepal known as **Surya Kiran**.

▪ Cultural

- There have been initiatives to promote people-to-people contacts in the area of art & culture, academics and media with different local bodies of Nepal.
- India has signed three **sister-city agreements** for twinning of **Kathmandu-Varanasi, Lumbini-Bodhgaya and Janakpur-Ayodhya**.

▪ Humanitarian Assistance

- Nepal lies in a sensitive ecological fragile zone which is prone to earthquakes, floods causing massive damage to both life and money, whereby it remains the biggest recipient of India's humanitarian assistance.

▪ Multilateral Partnership

- India and Nepal share multiple multilateral forums such as **BBIN** (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal), **BIMSTEC** (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), **Non Aligned Movement**, and **SAARC** (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) etc.

▪ Issues & Challenges

◦ China's Intervention:

- As a landlocked nation, Nepal depended for many years on Indian imports, and India played an active role in Nepal's affairs.
- However, in recent years, Nepal has **drifted away from India's influence**, and China has gradually filled the space with investments, aid and loans.
- China considers Nepal a key partner in its **Belt and Road Initiative** (BRI), and wants to **invest in Nepal's infrastructure** as part of its grand plans to boost global trade.
- Rising Nepal and China cooperation can undermine Nepal's distinction of **buffer state** between India and China.
- China on the other hand wants to avoid the formation of any **Anti-China stance by the Tibetans living in Nepal**.

◦ Border Dispute:

- The [issue erupted in November 2019](#) when Nepal had released a new political map that claims **Kalapani, Limpiyadhura and Lipulekh of Uttarakhand as part of Nepal's territory**. The area of **Susta** (West Champaran district, Bihar) can also be noted in the new map.

Way Forward

- India should negotiate diplomatically to resolve the boundary dispute with Nepal under the aegis of [International law on Trans-boundary Water Disputes](#). In this case, boundary dispute resolution between [India and Bangladesh should serve as a model](#).
- India should engage more proactively with Nepal in terms of **people to people engagement, bureaucratic engagement as well as political interactions**.
- Mere **differences shall not turn into disputes** and both the countries should resolve the issues peacefully.

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